

## NARRATIVE OF THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION.—PART II.

BY AN OFFICER OF THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

(From *Blackwood for June*)

[CONTINUED.]

The only difficult and dangerous rapids in this section were on the Sturgeon River, where extreme care is necessary in running them. A number of Iroquois were permanently stationed there until all the troops had gone by, who took down every boat, only one being totally wrecked. It is a fine sight to watch these splendid boatmen taking a boat down. Four generally rowed or paddled; two others steered, with large sized paddles—one in the bow the other in the stern. The post of honour is in the bow; and it was curious to see how their eyes sparkled with fiery enthusiasm as they approached the roaring, seething waters, where the breaking of a paddle, or a false movement of any sort, would send the whole crew to certain death. They seemed the roughly at home at the most trying moment for there is generally in all rapids one particular spot—perhaps where some back eddy from a rock tends to suck in everything that approaches—that is the climax of the danger, which if passed safely, the rest is easy sailing. The intensity of the look with which they regard the rushing water in front of them, whilst every fibre in their powerful frames is at its utmost tension, is a thing to be admired, but not to be described in words, nor even on canvass. There is a mixture of extreme almost unearthly enjoyment, alloyed with the realization of the danger to be encountered, in their expression, which we never remember having seen in any face before, except in the countenances of soldiers at the hottest moment of a storming party. It bespoke the earnestness of men prepared to dare anything, and who gloried and revelled in the attendant danger.

Our daily routine was as follows: At the first streak of daylight (occasionally long before it) the *reveille* was sounded, followed quickly by a cry of "Fort Garry" from every tent or bivouac fire. This was the watchword of the force, as "Arms, men, and canoes" ("Arma virumque cano") was the punning motto adopted for us by our witty chaplain. Tents were struck and stowed away in the boats, and all were soon on board and working hard at the oar. We halted for an hour at 8 A. M. for breakfast and again for another hour for dinner at 1 p. m., and finally for the night about 6 or 7 p. m. It was surprising after the first week's practice, to see the rapidity with which the men cooked; they quickly became most expert at lighting fires, cutting down trees, &c. &c. The sun soon burnt them a dark colour; indeed some became nearly black, the reflection from the water having a very bronzing effect upon the skin. The wear and tear upon their clothes was excessive; carrying loads on their backs tore their shirts and coats, whilst the constant friction from rowing soon wore large holes in their trousers, which being patched with canvass from the bags in which the beans or other provisions had been carried, gave them a most motley appearance. Leading a sort of amphibious life, they were well nicknamed the "canvas-backed ducks." This constant pulling was very monotonous employment, but we had a goal to reach, and all felt that every stroke of the oar brought us nearer to it. The long portages were most trying to the pluck and endurance of our

men and it is very questionable whether the soldiers of any other nation would or could have gone through the same amount of physical labour that fell to our lot daily. It is upon such occasions that we learn to appreciate the full value of the British officer. He may be idle in peace, but the very amusements of his idle hours—boating, shooting, hunting, cricket, &c., &c.—fit him to shine when hard work has to be done, in a manner that would be impossible to the spectacled bookworm of Germany, or the cafe-lounging *flâneur* of France. Our officers carried barrels of pork and other loads on their backs like the men; and the emulation and rivalry between the captains of companies, each being afraid that he should be passed in the race, soon spread to all ranks. You had only to tell a detachment that some other company had done a thing without any great effort to insure its prompt execution. There are also called into play the rivalry between the regulars and the militia. The latter were determined that no matter what the former did, they would not be beaten. The regulars were in front all the time. One had only to tell them that they were making so little progress that the militia complained of being kept back by their slowness, to cause them to push ahead at any required speed; and *vice versa*, if you told the militia that the regulars were running from them, each successive company hurried on until those in the immediate front were overtaken. Indeed it may be said that each detachment trod upon the heels of the one before it, all were so eager to get on. At some shallow places, the men had to get into the water, and pull their boats along after them. Occasionally it was necessary to unload them partially or entirely, the boats being then run down the rapids, or hauled over the shallow spots into deep water, where they were re-loaded, their cargoes being carried along the banks by the soldiers. At times it blew very hard from the west so that many detachments were detained one or two days on some of the large lakes, unable even to start.

A voyage W. by N. of forty miles across Rainy Lake takes you to Rainy River, upon the right bank of which stands Fort Francis, two miles from the lake. The landing detachment reached this post on the 4th of August. They had done two hundred miles in nineteen days, having taken their boats, stores, &c., &c., over seventeen portages in that time, and having made a good practicable road at all these seventeen places, the troops in rear of them were able to make the journey quicker, as they found a made road and rollers laid down for the boats at every portage.

Fort Francis a Hudson Bay Company trading post is exactly due west from Shebandowan Lake. It is a collection of one-storied wooden buildings, surrounded by palisading. Although dignified by the high sounding title of fort, it has no military works whatever about it. The river bends here so that immediately in front of the place is a very fine fall, about twenty-two feet in height, from below which the broken boiling, bubbling waters send up volumes of spray covering the land, according to the direction of the wind, with a perpetually falling rain. This, and the luxuriant fertility of the soil, causes the banks near it to be clothed with grass of the brightest green, affording the richest pasture. After the wilderness of water, rocks, and scrubby wood that we had passed through, the sight of cattle grazing, and of ripe wheat bending before the lightest wind from the heaviness of the ear, was most refreshing. Only a few

acres were under cultivation, although there was a considerable clearance; and a large extent covered with bushes bore evidence to there having been here at one time a good sized farm. There was a garden close to the dwelling-house where there were pease, potatoes growing, and apparently going to waste, until we arrived to partake of them.

A mill for grinding corn had once existed here, there being water-power enough on the spot to drive every mill in America, but it had disappeared. There was an air of decay and neglect about the place that bespoke either poverty or want of energy on the part of those in charge. The half-breed race to which the officers of the Hudson Bay Company at such posts generally belong now, is extremely apathetic—there is no go-aheadness about it and in these out-of-the-way localities the half-breeds quickly go back to the manners, customs, and mode of living of their Indian mothers. They live upon fish as their Indian ancestors did, and like them have no appreciation of the value of cleanliness or order.

By the rules of the Company, it is compulsory to have at each post an ice house, a garden and a few cows; so they have them but they seem to care for none of these things.

The fertile belt of land along the north bank of Rainy River is only about a mile in width, great swamps existing between it and the chain of lakes which lies to the northward. There had been a large Indian encampment here during the early part of July, it being a great annual resort for the surrounding tribes; but this summer, as they expected our arrival amongst them, they had collected from all quarters in the hope of obtaining presents. They also wished to appear imposing by their numbers so as to enhance the value of their goodwill towards us, and to impress upon the white faced soldier how formidable they might be as enemies. Unfortunately for the success of their intentions, we were not able to start for at least six weeks after the time originally proposed for our departure from Shebandowan; so that as days wore on and there was no sign of our arrival, the crowd grew weary of waiting, particularly as their supply of fish in the neighbourhood became exhausted, there being so many mouths to feed. The Government had early in the preceding winter sent a gentleman to Fort Francis for the purpose of keeping the Indians of that district quiet, and preventing them from being tampered with by Riel. He had exerted his influence—which was considerable—to induce them to disperse, fearing that their presence might lead to a collision with the soldiery when engaged in carrying stores and boats over the portage on which stood the Indian wigwams. His persuasions, and that most potent of arguments, an empty stomach soon caused them to leave; so that when we arrived not more than about a dozen lodges remained, although their uncovered poles stood thickly around, reminding one of the way poles are piled together in a field at home when the hops have been picked.

Col. Wolsley had several "pow-wows" with those that remained. A hideous old chief named Crooked-neck, from the manner in which his head was set on his shoulders, was the principal speaker. He was very old and very dirty, and, in the name of his people, made most exorbitant demands in stating the terms on which they were prepared to allow us permanently to open out a route through their territory. There was much difficulty in making them understand