



MAKING A PORTAGE.

"And the forest life is in it,
All its mystery and magic,
All the brightness of the birch-tree,
All the toughness of the cedar,
All the larches' supple sinews;
And it floated on the river
Like a yellow leaf in autumn,
Like a yellow water-lily."

So says Longfellow, and the description is accurate. These canoes are made of various sizes. Sometimes they are as large as forty feet in length, and five feet wide in the middle, where its breadth is the greatest. The small size is usually about twelve feet long and two feet only in width. One can scarcely imagine how useful this article is to the red man. It is everything to him, home, shelter, (for he rests under it at night,) his freight and passenger train. In it, he hunts his game and gathers his rice. It is his delight to paddle in it from morning till night, in the broadest lake or tiniest shallow, when the waters are smooth or the billows heave, up the stream or down the current,—he lives in his birch bark canoe.

When in his travels he comes to some impassable barrier like high rocks or a rushing cascade, his plan is to take the canoe out of the water and carry it past the obstruction till once more arrived at smooth waters. But an Indian hates toil and shirks it if he can, and rather than carry his canoe and luggage for miles to avoid rapids, he will risk all, and rush headlong into the seething waters. In fact, the only thing which stops him in this way is the perpendicular fall. There is great excitement in shooting rapids, and, of course, it is attended with more or less danger. When approaching rapids, the most experienced boatman sits in the stern with the steering paddle, the next best boatman sits in the bow, and so they move on

rapidly down the stream. Soon they hear the unmistakable sound of rapids ahead. The bowsman kneels down and looks anxiously straight before him, with his hand behind him so that the steersman can see it, and that hand is all that the steersman dare look at. He steers by it according to its slightest move. Sometimes the waters take a sudden fall, so that they are lost to sight ahead. Then is an anxious moment. The bowsman stands up for a moment to see the extent and nature of the eddying rush before him. He signals all to the steersman with his hand behind him. And at once, there is but a confused feeling of rushing water, hissing spray, jagged rocks, and speed like the arrow,—and then 'all is over, and the canoe, as if trembling for a moment with its late excitement, glides on in smooth water.

Should an accident occur and the canoe strike a sharp rock or stick and become broken, she is hauled up to shore, and very speedily and cleverly mended by fastening fresh bark over the rent and pouring resin over it. In a surprisingly short time all is ready for the journey again.

It is not Indians alone, however, that have found the birch-bark canoe useful. In the old life of the wilderness the canoe played an important part, and the half-breed *voyageur* managed it as skilfully as the Indian, except that he was usually more willing to avoid rapids, by putting into shore and carrying his canoe and baggage to safer waters. This was called, "making a portage." The North West Company, which had its headquarters in Montreal, imported its entire supplies into the country, and exported all its furs out of it in canoes. Not less than ten brigades, each numbering twenty canoes, passed over the route during the summer months.