



ATHABASCA: GROUP OF BOATS AWAITING ARRIVAL OF THE BISHOP.

A MISSION TOUR IN ATHABASCA.

BY THE BISHOP OF ATHABASCA.
No. II.

MERGING from the willow bushes that hedge the tortuous course of the Slave river, and passing the sandy ridge that, at this point, forms the lake shore, the lake lies before us. About three miles away is an island, partially wooded, making, on a summer's evening, a pleasing foreground. Flanking the lake, both on its eastern and western sides, are well-wooded hills, tinged with the rich hues of the setting sun, while purple in the distance stands out the bold ridge, known as the "House" mountain.

Early next morning our brigade of boats was gathered in a little bay of the island previous to starting over the lake.

Their gathering here and start out on the lake were made use of for photographing the brigade, though with poor success.

A traverse of some twelve miles was made, and we landed on the main western shore for dinner. Heavy thunder-showers, intervalled by hot gleams of bright sun, were chasing each other along the ridge of hills to the east of the lake, but now and again reaching across the lake. To the north the sky looked black and threatening. Our guide hesitated to start with the heavy-laden craft, especially as a traverse over an arm of the lake lay just ahead. Provision for the crews, however, in one main source was at a low ebb, viz., bacon, and this turned the scale. We started, and had reached about half way across, when a head wind got up with increasing force. The crews labored

hard at the ponderous oars. It was an interesting spectacle to watch our companion boats rising and falling, and dashing the spray over their bows, as they slowly forged ahead amid the short, heavy waves. The rising gale necessitated our camping for two days on a swampy tongue of land which oozed with moisture every time the foot pressed it. Sunday evening the wind calmed sufficiently to start. Shortly after doing so we reached the "narrows" and crossed to the easterly side.

The lake, from being a stormy sea, had calmed down till its surface mirrored every changing hue of the sky. A cheer rose from the toiling crews as a breeze after sundown gave promise of a sail wind. Each boat's crew hurried to get up the primitive gear of mast, yard, and huge square sail, whose rig is almost classical in its suggestion of the rig of an old Roman galley.

As the stars shone out and the cool night breeze bellied out the lumbering sail, we rolled ourselves in our blankets and sought for as many square inches of level area as our guide could clear for our tired and somewhat cramped limbs. Thus lying prone, listening to the ripple and gurgle of the water on the boat's side, or lazily contemplating the dark outline of mast and sail gently waving over head, nature spread for our entertainment one of her gorgeous displays. The northern lights, first like a luminous haze, spread over the sky, then concentric bands that flashed in all the colors of the rainbow, a rich purple predominating. As the charmed eye followed the dancing motions of the spiral bands, one easily realized the suggestion to the superstitious mind of the Indian that he was gazing on the spirits of his ancestors moving in solemn dance in the great spirit world above.

We woke in the cold morning air by the grating of the boat's keel on the shingly beach. Blazing fires soon marked the rallying point of each of the six crews, and hot tea, bannock, and bacon were far from unwelcome in a country where indigestion rarely occurs. Indigestion is the more common complaint, attributable to a frequent lack of something to digest.

Arrived at the Hudson's Bay Company's post, where we received a most kind welcome from Mr. and Mrs. McDonald and other of the company's officers, we gathered ourselves and our belongings into one of the boats and crossed Buffalo Lake under a blazing sun that might compete with the tropics.

A little crowd at the landing, on our nearer approach, resolved itself into the Rev. G. Holmes, Rev. M. Scott, and Rev. H. Robinson, Mr. P. Muller, and boys of the Indian school.

The first glad greetings and enquiries over, we wended our way through a tree-like growth of willows to the mission. This lies on a flat,