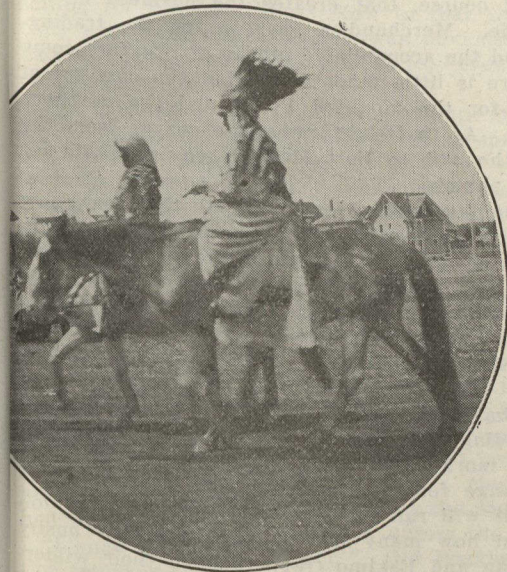


es of islands and white dots of drifting scows  
re went by rowing and gave them the password  
Mahoney got weary of exercising himself and  
ed to fall asleep under a cloud. I did the same  
d the dog. When we woke up the boat was  
g ashore among the willows and it was raining.  
itched camp, hooking the ring in the canvas-  
f our mosquito bar on to a bent sapling and  
g down the cheesecloth sides, piling in the  
ets, and in slickers went firing up in the wet  
for a hot supper of bacon and beans and dried

ht wriggled reluctantly through the rain as we  
ed under cover and rolled into the blankets,  
the dog got under a spare canvas in the boat.  
on the poplar leaves—pattering vast music,  
of it, and the rushing, swishing river—and  
we crawled out at sunrise the land was a blaze  
an sunlight.

WEATHER'S a queer critter," growled Mahoney.

"But I like it." Whereat after breakfast  
ackup he hauled out his banjo and tunked off  
to the top of the morning while I worked the  
down past blocks of bush where coyotes came  
drink and sit on the sand like dogs, where a  
deer now and again flicked among the poplars,  
g Mahoney to grab at his rifle and predict that  
these days we'd be in the moose belt, wherever  
And we soon got used to letting the boat  
while the hot sun pelted our necks and the  
oozed, and Galicians came out of the bush to  
the pole fish-nets, much exciting Mahoney, who  
I to go visiting—he was such a sociable dog.  
we soon got down past the Galicians into the  
f unlimited solitude—limited only by a casual  
eed village and a now-and-then scow drifting  
to the trade-posts and the missions. We were  
bsolute children of the big river, as sensitive



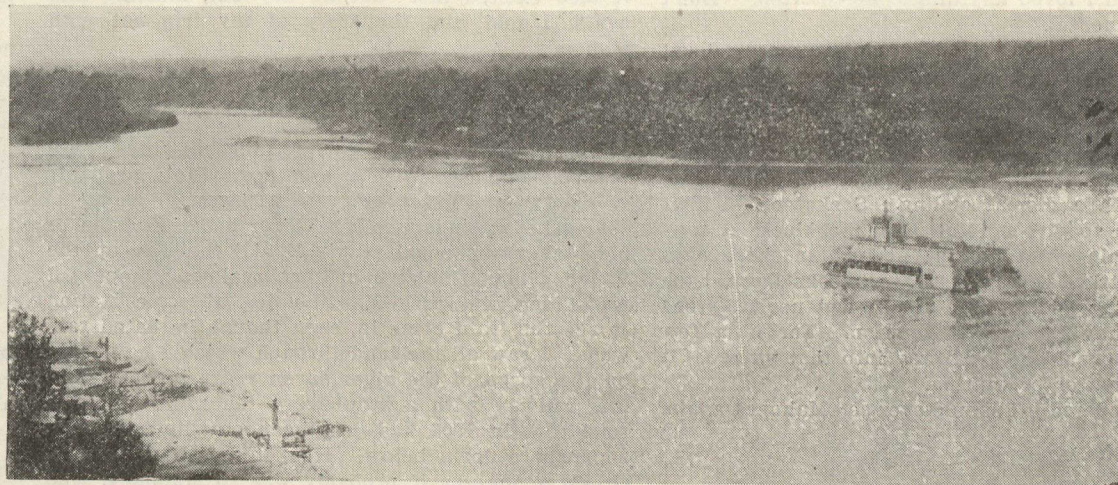
spectacular Indians in to spend treaty money."

vagrant humours as though we had been  
ded from York boatmen.

But when at the end of a week of this we  
to the Loon Lake landing, the "stony busted  
r" gave signs of becoming a land-lubber again.  
bered kindergarten Cree to a clump of shock-  
natives on skinny cayuses, who informed us  
e Agency was six miles inland over the hills;  
t having securely cached the contents of the  
id given admonishment to the Crees to touch  
smell of it, because we were going to lodge  
e Agent, who would smite them, we tramped  
e miles amid a doddering caravan of Cree  
nd red shawls and frowsy dogs.

ed. Family all at home in a large, domestic-  
house on a low, broad knoll overlooking a  
ous panorama.  
ne my eyes," mumbled the adoring Mahoney,  
gave one sudden glance at sundown over the  
le. "If it isn't heavenly—mosquitoes and all."  
rew down the green-gauze curtain of his cow-  
t as he came into a cloud of mosquitoes.  
ley below the Agency Hill was a smoke-curling  
gen ring of bronzered tepees, bright green  
and deserted winter shacks; threaded by a  
ribbon of gleaming water that was much  
than usual because of rains. The Agency  
arked. Out came two young ladies dressed  
e conventional style.

ney drew up his veil and greeted them with  
rish gravity. He had met them in Edmonton  
nces and the like. He introduced me. The  
seemed very glad to see us—unshaven and



And this was the way the Saskatchewan looked to Mahoney and Me and the dog.

camp-dudded as we were. Travelers by an unknown  
route, and fresh down from Edmonton, the 1235 town  
of no railway, we had about us the light of magic  
aureole of the globe-trotter.

In a very little while he was so adroitly at home  
among these denizens of the Cree hills that he was  
able to monopolize the girls, leaving me to be enter-  
tained by very interesting parents, father gruff,  
bearded and matter-of-fact, mother a little lady who,  
from all her wedded life among the Crees, had clung  
passionately to the idea of civilization.

MAHONEY had no desire to leave next day. He  
was for going the rounds among the Crees  
with the Agent. But it rained. Mahoney, I'm posi-  
tive, fell in love with one of the girls—he scarcely  
knew which. When the rain stopped it was too late  
to go back to the boat. John, the half-breed do-for-all  
at the Agency, took a streak over to the river and  
reported that she had come up ten feet, still rising  
and with a current of unquestionable speed.

Owing to the beguilements of the young ladies,  
who had seen nobody civilized for many a moon, we  
consented to wait over until the scow should go down.

"Only a matter of a day or two," said Mahoney.  
"And it's easier than paddling that boat."

He took a hectic notion to study telegraphy over  
at the shack of the operator, who was also in love  
with one of the girls, he scarcely knew which; and  
that left me free to ruminate on what a shakeup  
would come to that mediaeval settlement among the  
Crees and to dozens more like it if ever the much-  
dreamed-of railway came shrieking in there.  
Mahoney scoffed at the idea.

"Fit only for Indians and mosquitoes, was the  
Hudson Bay description of the country when they  
wanted to keep settlers out," he reminded every-  
body. "A genial distortion as I'll admit. No doubt  
the land will grow anything but lemons. But it  
never will be farmed in our day. Good lord! it's  
the plumb vortex of nowhere—and I'm glad of it.

The Agent agreed with him. But not the Agent's  
daughters. I know those girls hankered to be taken  
along on the scow when it started for Battleford.  
They were the two saddest folk in 10,000 square  
miles when big John drove us over to the landing  
with a team of oxen behind the rig. They might  
never see us again. So said Mahoney, always a  
romancer.

"However, don't weep," I advised him, as we loaded  
oxen and horses on the scow just newly down from  
Edmonton with half her cargo destined for down  
below, including half a carload of British Columbia  
shingles. "Railways make the world pretty small,  
you know."

We were soon out amidstream, a house-boat and  
a freighter all in one, horses and oxen amidships,  
a long pole sweep abaft and astern and a fireplace,  
whose smoke drifted out over our boat snub-nosed  
along one side just out of reach of the stern sweep  
in its socket.

That was a lubbering, pole-creaking, porridge-  
eating trip into more and more solitude, day after  
day among the snyes of bewildering islands, with  
now a band of horses swimming the river ahead,  
once at daybreak a moose which caused big John  
to whop himself with a rifle into the boat and go  
down stream ahead of the scow.

"No get him," he panted, as he clambered on deck  
again for breakfast.

The river was going down. Sandbars pushed their  
grey backs up through the water. With much skill  
John steered away from them—until far down past  
old Fort Pitt and five days out with no signs of habi-

tations anywhere, we hung up on one and all hands  
piled out with pry-poles to shove off, Mahoney, as I  
remember, in his shirt only. After which there was  
a smug session with a bottle of Irish.

One gem of a morning, about two hours after  
sundown, one of those sandbars hooked us fast close  
along shore. We had no way of getting her off. By  
John's orders the horses and oxen were landed over  
gang-planks, and John and Mahoney went scouting  
to find out where under the sun we might be; came  
back late in the day to say that we were forty miles  
west of Battleford, and that John would drive me  
over to the town by trail, leaving Mahoney to look  
after the scow till a crew could be sent back to shove  
her loose.

That trail-hammering clip to old Battleford town  
by evening and night over muskeg and poplared plain  
put me asleep. I woke up to find John hammering  
at the door of a whitewashed hotel. We had supper  
amid strange folk and went to sleep. Next day  
gaudy and spectacular Indians came to town to spend  
treaty money, while John rounded up a few and  
went back to fetch down the scow.

This white-walled, dormer-windowed old Battleford,  
at the junction of two rivers, gave me the same kind  
of feeling that Mahoney had got back in the hills.  
It was strangely, hauntingly beautiful; a pagan, lazy,  
Cree-clattering place that might have been the cradle  
of some big town or young city to be—whenever  
the railway should come; and the white folk were  
all clacking of that. What did I know, what had  
we heard about it? Nothing. Well—we should see.

Next day down came the scow. Mahoney and the  
dog bounded into town with splutter enough for a  
camp of Crees.

"Look here," he said, hastily, as he eyed the squint-  
ing and enchanted town. "We'd better call off that  
river trip. My eyes are sore from water-glare. We  
can sell the boat and the camp outfit here and—"



"The Packing-case and the Box-car were everywhere."

"You're going back to Loon Lake to learn tele-  
graphing," I suggested. "You don't want to get to  
Winnipeg."

"Winnipeg be damned!" he exploded. "All I  
wanted was to escape anybody's town. Towns are  
the invention of the devil, and a new town is worse  
than an old one."

The inconstant bounder!

"I know what's wrong with you," I said, suddenly.