

together, crashing down the rapids—verily, the refinements of city life are far from being congenial to their wild nature. Nature in all her freedom, unrestrained by the customs or civilization, has made the *voyageurs* a peculiarly intrepid, romantic race—with rather a tendency to the savage. The *voyageurs* are a proof that when man is placed in circumstances at all favourable, he soon learns to assume the savage. There is an actual romance about their lives, in the continual exposure to danger of every kind, which cannot but interest us in studying their character and habits. Washington Irving, in his “Astoria,” describes their peculiar condition and mode of life, so far as he saw, and Henry was interested in them also. The former writer has, however, given them too much credit for “submission to their masters.” I notice this particularly, because it is a great mistake. Generally, you do not find men who are free, and whose passions are unrestrained, submit to every whim of those above them. The master cannot force them to labor, he dares not strike them; it is only by conciliation, and not coercion, that they will respect their superiors. It is the most difficult thing in the world to get them to obey their leaders, and the man appointed captain of a raft is usually chosen by and from among themselves. It is not every man they will obey; and they would think no more of pitching him into the river, if their passions were aroused, than they would a rotten log. I have seen these men in every mood and in many circumstances, and I assure you submission is not one of their virtues. Even in the matter of rowing and working, they will do neither if eating and fighting is more agreeable. I may remark however, that the Hudson Bay Company’s authority is somewhat respected by the *voyageurs*.

The *voyageurs* consist chiefly of Half-breed Indians, French Canadians, and some Scotch and Irish. But I never heard even the latter two speak in English to each other. Their language is a mixture of Indian, French, and English, very much intermixed with “*sacres*.” It is the most inconceivable jargon or *patois* and curses that humanity ever devised. One would think it was a trial to see who would make the most noise, the most gesticulation, and be the least understood. They will yell in each other’s ears, like the chattering of a thousand monkeys, till your senses seem wandering, and you expect to see them eat each other up. While disputing with each other, and if a civilized being is near, they will suddenly turn round upon him for his opinion, with an expression of face and action that *might* start the hair of some people on end, and set them to reciting their prayers. And, as generally, the man they select doesn’t understand a word they say, he has to shrug his shoulders and say “*pas comprendre*.” I pity the nervous man who gets into their company.

Now some may conclude that such a class of men, who seem partial to every thing rough and noisy, can be no tempting addition to our population. True; and the roughness and the noisiness are not, but the men are indispensable. Very much of the lumber trade of Canada, and business of the Hudson’s Bay Company could not be carried on. Canada could not do without them, and the Hudson’s Bay Company might paddle their own canoe “brigades,” or shut up their establishment, if the *voyageurs* refused to work. The Hudson’s Bay Company and Canadian lumberers principally employ them. Those engaged by the former, bring the furs, packed—in which the Company traffics—in Spring, to the three chief depôts on the sea coast, viz.: Fort Vancouver, at the mouth of the Columbia River, on the Pacific Shores; Fort York, on the shores of Hudson’s Bay; and Moose Factory, on the shores of St. James’ Bay, from whence they are transported in the Company’s ships to England. The *voyageurs* of this Company are consequently oftener in the canoe than on the raft, and are not the same we are so familiar with—the lumberers. A great commotion is caused by the brigade of boats laden with merchandise and furs. “The still waters of the lakes and rivers are rippled by the paddle and oar, and the long silent echoes, which have slumbered in the icy embrace of a dreary winter, are now once more awakened by the merry voices and tuneful songs of the hardy *voyageurs*.” I cannot do better than give you the following quotation from Mr. Ballantyne’s “Hudson’s Bay,” on selecting the men for a brigade:—

“Choosing the men for this long and arduous voyage was an interesting scene. L’Espérance, the old guide who had many a day guided this brigade through the lakes and rivers of the interior, made his appearance at the fort a day or two before starting; and at his heels followed a large band of wild, careless, happy looking Half-breeds. Having collected in front of the office door, Mr. McK. went out, with a book and pencil in his hand, and told L’Espérance to begin. The guide went a little apart from the rest, accompanied by the steersmen, (seven or eight in number), and then, scanning the group of dark, athletic men who stood smiling before him, called out “Pierre!” A tall, herculean man answered to the

call, and stepping out from among the rest, stood beside his friend and guide. After this, one of the steersmen chose another man, and so on till the crews of all the boats were completed. Their names were then marked down in a book, and they all proceeded to the trading room, for the purpose of taking “advances,” in the shape of shirts, trowsers, bonnets, caps, capotes, tobacco, and all the other things necessary for a long and toilsome journey.”

This recruiting must be a strange scene indeed. When a brigade of boats are on their journey they go well stocked with food, and encamp on the shores at certain times for their meals. Then, they consist mostly of pemican and flour, boiled into a thick soup, called *robbiboo*. The same materials are sometimes fried, for variety, and is then called *richeau*. The latter is preferable, I think. I suppose you know what *pemican* is. It is made by pounding the best parts of the meat very small, dried by frost or a fire. This is put into bags made of the skin of the animal, and melted fat poured into it. When spiced it is really splendid. The above soup is boiled in kettles, hung upon tripods over a fire, and is constantly stirred while boiling. I may here mention that when the *voyageurs* are travelling they measure distances by pipes, as they call it. They stop paddling at certain times, light their pipes and smoke for a few minutes; then start again, refreshed, paddling at the rate of about fifty strokes a minute. “Trois pipes” (three pipes) are about twelve miles, and I can tell you the *voyageurs*’ pipe yearning is a perfect sun-dial, and they can tell exactly when “a pipe” is to commence again.

It is a fine sight to see one of these canoe brigades leaving on their voyage. “*B n jour*,” “*au revoir*,” “*hooroo!*” and strange exclamations of farewell greet those on shore. Then the stroke is taken up and away they go, the fine manly fellows keeping time to the lively chorus of “*A la claire fontaine*,” or to the *tigraote* which every one of them joins in, and which runs precisely like this:—

“Ta la th’ ra te,  
Ta la, la, la,  
Ta la th’ ra te,  
Ta la, la, la, la! Hooro!”

It is amusing what life this absurd bit of composition will put into them. I wish I could give you the air here; it is so laughable. The scene is really beautiful as you see the regular motion of the light red paddle, and hear the swelling voices across the waters.

Their arrival at Lachine, nine miles from Montreal—where is the depot of the late Hudson’s Bay Company—is a time of great excitement. The wild picturesque appearance of the men, and the distance they have come, awakens a sympathy for them, and hundreds will go from town to see them. Their appearance in the city is very odd. They go along the streets, either gaping and staring at everything, and in such haste and excitement that they run against people and stumble over little obstructions. They laugh out straight in the face of some exquisite, roar aloud with laughter at the extensiveness of the ladies’ hoops, and the peculiarity of their hats, &c.; look in the windows at the jumble of new things, to them, and have hearty laughs at what they consider the absurdities and curiosities of city people.

The dress of the *voyageur* is half-civilized, half-savage. Some of them dress very fantastically; light blue capotes (hoods) corduroy trowsers, or leather or b’auket leggings, moose skin moccasins, striped blue and white shirt, and a belt of scarlet; the leggings and other parts of their dress being decorated with beads and bits of colored cloth, or curiously cut tin. The covering for their head are often adorned with feathers, gold and silver tinsel cord, &c. But we don’t often see this swell-*voyageur*; never among the lumberers. The shirt is left open from the neck half way down the breast, showing the sunburnt, brawny neck and bosoms. Many of them trust to their thick, black hair for a head covering; many of them wear felt hats, especially when coming into the city. In fact, one notices the affectation to the savage style of dress. The *voyageurs* of the Hudson’s Bay Company dress more fantastically than the raftsmen; are mostly finer men also; and a good many more of them are married. Surely the woman who would “of her own free will” marry a *voyageur*, and follow him, at times, through the woods, and on the rafts, and labor for his comfort, surely such a woman must have devoted love in her heart. What a blessing so many people in the world are so easily satisfied.

The *voyageur* is never a “man of property.” His worldly possessions are generally the clothes on his back, a knives—sometimes a gun—and a well-tempered axe; not forgetting the minutæ of tobacco, short handled pipe, a piece of another piece of comb, a bit of looking-glass, matches, flint, &c., only surpassed in number by the contents of a little girl’s pocket. When a *voyageur* buys a