

It is a cheerful position from which to survey life, that of fire-tender on the Stikine, when the dark begins to fall amongst the dumb woods, where no squirrels chatter, no birds call. The only signs of life around the camp are the great tracks on the sand (where last night the she bear and her cubs came down to fish), the 'houk houk' of passing geese, the splash of dying salmon on the creek where you filled your kettle, later on the resounding smack of the beaver's tail, and withal the tireless accompaniment of the rain. To such music you try to sleep, and not in vain, if your bed is a gravel-bar and not a sand-spit. On a gravel-bar you can find room for a sore bone between the pebbles, but sand packs harder than the bed of a billiard table, and your only chance then is to lie flat on your back, where there are no special corners to be worn down.

As elsewhere in British Columbia, the salmon is the basis of all life on the Stikine. Twice a year he comes flashing up from the sea, a dark swift shadow, which the Indians spear near the mouths of the Stikine's tributary streams. There is a white man's cannery at the mouth of the river, and several Indians' drying-grounds between the mouth and the Tal Tan fishery, but the toll these take seems to make no difference. Year after year the little streams are full of ill-formed, hook-nosed monsters, rotting as they swim, crimson with corruption, or colourless as they drift down stream, tails upward, dead and decomposing as they drift. None ever return to the sea, the Indians tell you, and though I have watched for days and weeks by these streams for bear, I have never yet seen anything like a 'mended' keel. And yet the supply continues, and bears pack the red fish up into the woods, eagles gorge themselves on them until they cannot fly, otherwise respectable mallards render themselves unfit for table by eating them, the grey seals follow them far up the river, the mink dines on them, and I almost suspect the porcupine of similar iniquity. But I may wrong this last beast. Poor old Salmon! I ought to be ashamed to look at you, for have I not killed you in every way but the legitimate one? Have I not speared you with sharpened pine-poles, shot you on the shallows, clubbed you with a paddle when you were left nearly high and dry, snatched you, tickled you, poached you generally? and yet it was your fault, because you are such an uncivilised idiot that you won't take a fly.

For a description of the river scenery when the rain stops and the clouds lift I must refer my readers to the illustrations, and for scientific information to the admirable report of Professor