

# A Romance of the Yukon River

By H. A. CODY.

**T**HE Yukon River is a name familiar the world over, owing to the part it played as the great highway during the Klondyke rush of '97 and '98. This was not always so, for only a few years before that time the river was little known, except to Indians, and a few hardy prospectors and explorers.

The origin of the name is shrouded in mystery. The North Pacific Coast Indians have a legend that Ganook, a mysterious man, possessed a spring of living water, which was stolen by his enemy, the great Raven. This latter at once made toward the north with his stolen treasure, and dropping some of the water upon the ground said, "Become a mighty stream." Thus the Yukon, or "A-yan," was formed, which signifies "The powerful one."

It is generally believed that the Russians were the first to explore the lower part of this noble river, about the year 1835, to which they gave the name "Quick-pak," and though this portion became well known, the head waters remained unexplored for some time after.

The Hudson's Bay Company was early on the scene, and in 1846, a trader, John Bell, crossed the Rocky Mountains from the Mackenzie River, descended the Porcupine, and was the first of British explorers to set eyes on the Lower Yukon. Five years before, that prince of rovers, Robert Campbell, ascended the Liard River from Fort Simpson, reached the Pelly Banks, and descending this stream to its junction with the Lewis River, was forced to turn back owing to the hostility of the Indians in that region. In 1849 he returned, and established a trading post at the confluence of these rivers, and named it Fort Selkirk, which was destroyed two years later by the Chilkat Indians from the Coast.

Several years later hardy prospectors, explorers, and Government surveyors, forced their way over frowning mountain passes, and floated from the extreme head waters down stream. But these visits were at rare intervals, and hurriedly made, and the noble river was thus left for some time undisturbed.

## THE AWAKENING OF 1897.

Suddenly the great water-way awakened to new life. It thrilled with animation. Strange sounds re-echoed from bank to bank, and novel sights appeared on every hand. The transformation was magical. A gleaming treasure had wrought the change, and throughout the world pulsed the important news that "the gold of that

land was good." Klondyke became a household word in every land under heaven, and a mad rush ensued. The Pacific Coast steamers from Seattle and elsewhere, were crowded with people drawn from every position in life, who struggled over the rugged White Pass, Chilcoot and Teslin trails, and reached the head waters of the Yukon River.

Then the navigation of this great stream really began. Bennett, a city of from ten to twenty thousand people, suddenly sprang into existence. Here, boats, rafts and scows of every conceivable shape were built, and launched with feverish haste to brave the rough, uncertain Lake Bennett, Windy Arm, the dreadful Whitehorse Rapids, and many unknown dangers beyond.

"From one point on Lake Bennett," wrote Colonel Steele, Superintendent of the North West Mounted Police, "I counted on an eight-mile stretch of water over eight hundred boats under full sail; and for forty-five miles, at no point were the boats more than two hundred yards apart."

This was in 1897, and all of that season the living stream moved by, and dotted the way with their dead. Lone posts along the river, rudely inscribed with some name marked the places where comrades parted from one another on the cruel trail of fortune.

## THE ARRIVAL OF THE STEAMER.

During this year not one steamer ploughed the head waters of the Yukon, but in 1898 a great change took place, and ere the closing of navigation no less than twelve steamers were plying on the waters between Dawson and Whitehorse.

The manner in which these boats were built, and rushed to the scene of action by enterprising people, is full of interest, and serves to show what pluck and determination will accomplish. The case of the steamer "Anglian," a craft of one hundred and fifteen tonnage, is truly representative.

In 1897 the Canadian Development Company, commonly known as the "C. D. Company," brought up the Stickine River, the complete machinery and furnishings for a steamer, together with a portable saw mill. These were landed at Telegraph Creek during the fall of the same year. One hundred and fifty miles away was Teslin Lake, the headwater of the Teslin or Hootalinqua River, which flows into the Yukon. There was only a moose trail of the roughest kind between the two waters, yet over this the machinery and supplies had to be carried. The task was almost Herculean, enough to appal the stoutest hearts.

At first mules were used as transports, and hay cut and pressed at Glenora, was brought along as food. Week after week steady progress was made, cutting out the trail, bridging streams, and crossing deep gulches. But, alas, food for the mules gave out, which had to be killed to supply food for the trained dogs which took their place. After difficulties indescribable, the shore of Lake Teslin was reached in midwinter.

Then began the work of building. The portable mill was erected, lumber sawn and prepared. And there on the shore of that inland lake, the steamer "Anglian" took shape, and in July, with Edward MacDonald as Captain, and Harry Chapman as engineer, she started on her long run down stream, and reached Dawson in August.

This is but typical of the efforts which were made to place steamers on the Yukon as quickly as possible to command the vast traffic which had sprung into existence. Expense was little thought of, and the "Anglian" cost the C. D. Company the great sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which in a short time was pronounced a failure, and was laid up at Whitehorse.

Though these boats were small and had very poor accommodation, yet they were literally packed with people, who paid large prices for the privilege of traveling on them. In the Police Reports of that time we read that it was a "common sight to see the 'tween and upper decks packed with sleeping Yukoners when the boats passed at night."

## THE FORMIDABLE RAPIDS.

The great obstacle to navigation was the world-famed "Whitehorse Rapids." Steamers ran from Bennett to the latter place, disembarked their goods and



The Flag Ship "White Horse" of the B. Y. N. Company, running the Five Fingers Rapids.