

We had intended to do some exploring and mountain climbing about Fortress Lake to complete last year's work, but smoke from some distant forest fire drifted over us, reducing the mountains, in a day or two after our arrival, to colorless ghosts, and destroying all chance of distant views.

After a few days of idleness, the only real holiday of our summer, we began a rush for home, leaving the lake on September 4th, following the Athabasca down to the mouth of the Sunwapta, ascending that river, crossing Jonas' Pass to the Brazeau, and following the Cataract Pass and River down to the foot of Sentinel Mountain on the Kootenay plains.

Here Mr. Stewart made a sudden resolve to run down the Saskatchewan in our canvas boat, and, failing to dissuade him, we divided to him one-fourth of all our sadly diminished goods and bade him farewell. Five minutes after he was out of sight beyond a bend, and had commenced his lonely journey, at first rushing through the rapids of the mountains, then sweeping more gently through the plains, till he reached the end of his voyage at Edmonton, 300 miles from his starting point.

The rest of us trotted our lightened ponies briskly over the Kootenay plains to the mouth of White Rabbit Creek. Here we occupied our old camp ground, and found that some one else had been there not long before, for a teepee had been pitched close by with only three poles, the minimum number possible. There was only one man in the outfit, as was shown by his narrow bed of boughs; and he was a white man, for his hob-nailed shoes had left their imprint on the mud when he filled his kettle at the creek; and he smoked, for a tiny heart-shaped bit of tin glittered on the earth beside the dead embers of his camp fire; and he had three ponies, for three tethering pegs stood a little way off on the yellow prairie. It must have been McGavan on his way home from the most northerly tributary of the Saskatchewan, disappointed in his search for the source of the Saskatchewan placer gold. He had, very likely, pitched his lodge close to our old camp for company; and I can imagine his gloom as he smoked by the fire, little cheered by the wag of his spaniel's tail, or the homely music of the cow-bell on his grazing pony.

Once more we crossed the pass to the Clearwater, and then to the Red Deer, and as we descended to the mountain park on September 12th we at last came once more upon human beings. Below us were twenty-one lodges of white or smoked-brown canvas planted on the prairie, and a couple of squaws with faggots of dry poplar looked curiously at us from the bushes as we passed. A hundred particolored ponies grazed near by or far away, a hundred dogs barked vociferously, and almost a hundred women and children came out to watch our approach. At this reception