

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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CANOE LIFE IN THE GREAT NORTH-WEST.

WHAT the horse is to the Aral, the camel to the desert traveller, or the dog to the Esquimaux, the birch-bark canoe is to the Indian. The forests along the river shores yield all the materials requisite for its construction; cedar for its ribs; birch-bark for its outer covering; the thews of the juniper to sew together the separate pieces; red pine to give resin for the seams and crevices.

"And the forest life is in it—
All its mystery and magic,
All the lightness of the birch-tree,
All the toughness of the cedar,
All the larch's supple sinews,
Like a yellow leaf in autumn,
Like a yellow water lily."

During the summer season the canoe is the home of the red man. It is not only a boat, but a house; he turns it over him as a protection when he camps; he carries it long distances over land from lake to lake. Frail beyond words, yet he loads it down to the water's edge. In it he steers boldly out into the broadest lake, or paddles through wood and swamp and reedy shallows. Sitting in it he gathers his harvest of wild rice, or catches fish, or steals upon his game; dashes down the wildest rapid, braves the foaming torrent, or lies like a wild bird on the placid waters. While the trees are green, while the waters dance and sparkle, and the wild duck dwells in the sedgy ponds, the birch-bark canoe is the red man's home.

And how well he knows the moods of the river! To guide his canoe through some whirling eddy, to shoot some roaring waterfall, to launch it by the edge of some fiercely-rushing torrent, or dash down a foaming rapid, is to be a brave and skilful Indian. The man who does all this, and does it well, must possess a rapidity of glance, a power in the sweep of his paddle, and a quiet consciousness of skill, not attained save by long years of practice.

An exceedingly light and graceful craft is the birch-bark canoe; a type of speed and beauty. So light that one man can easily carry it on his shoulders over land where a waterfall obstructs his progress; and as it only sinks five or six inches in the water, few places are too shallow to float it. In this frail bark, which measures anywhere from twelve to forty feet long, and from two to five feet broad in the middle, the Indian and his family travel over the innumerable lakes and rivers, and the fur-hunters pursue their lonely calling.

Canoe travel in the Fur Land presents many picturesque phases. Just

as the first faint tinge of coming dawn steals over the east, the canoe is lifted gently from its ledge of rock and laid upon the water. The blankets, the kettle, the guns, and all the paraphernalia of the camp, are placed in it, and the swarthy voyagers step lightly in. All but one. He remains on the shore

of beauty, some changing scene of lonely grandeur. The canoe sweeps rapidly over the placid waters; now buffeted with, and advances against, the rushing current of some powerful river, which seems to bid defiance to further progress, again, is carried over rocks and through deep forests, when some

bow—the important seat in the management of the canoe—rises upon his knees, and closely scans the wild scene before attempting the ascent. Clinking down again, he seizes the paddle, and pointing significantly to a certain spot in the chaos of boiling water before him, dashes into the stream. Yard by yard the rapid is thus ascended, sometimes scarcely gaining a foot a minute, again advancing more rapidly, until at last the light craft floats upon the very lip of the fall, and a long smooth piece of water stretches away up the stream.

But if the rushing or breasting up a rapid is exciting, the operation of shooting them in a birch bark canoe is doubly so. As the frail birch-bark nears the rapid from above, all is quiet. The most skilful voyager sits on his heels in the bow of the canoe, the next best oarsman similarly placed in the stern. The Bowman peers straight ahead with a glance like that of an eagle. The canoe, seeming like a cockle-shell in its frailty, silently approaches the rim where the waters disappear from view. On the very edge of the slope the Bowman suddenly stands up, and bending forward his head, peers eagerly down the eddying rush, then falls upon his knees again. Without turning his head for an instant, the sentient hand behind him signals its warning to the steersman. Now there is no time for thought, no eye is quick enough to take in the rushing scene. There are strange currents, unexpected whirls, and backward eddies and rocks—rocks rough and jagged, smooth, alipper, and polished—and through all this the canoe glances like an arrow, dips like a wild bird down the wing of the storm.

All this time not a word is spoken, but every now and again there is a quick twist of the bow paddle to edge far off some rock, to put her full through some boiling billow, to hold her steady down the slope of some thundering chute.—*Methodist Magazine for June.*

ALWAYS A POISON.

YEARS ago an aged and eminent man said: "If there is a particle of depravity in a man's heart a glass of brandy will find it out and stir it up." And what is true of brandy is true of alcohol in every shape. From the time of Noah till this day its effects have shown that it has an affinity for the worst parts of our nature. Hence we cannot be too careful in guarding young people against it. Strong drink is everywhere and always a poison. Let us firmly resolve that we will have nothing to do with it.



SHOOTING A RAPID.

to steady the bark on the water, and keep its sides from contact with the rock. The passenger takes his place in the centre, the outside man springs gently in, and the birch-bark canoe glides away from its rocky resting-place.

Each hour reveals some new phase

of foaming cataract bars its way. With a favouring breeze there falls upon the ear the rush and roar of water; and the canoe shoots toward a tumbling mass of spray and foam, studded with huge projecting rocks which mark a river rapid. As the canoe approaches the foaming flood, the voyager in the