

massacre of priests and traders at Frog Lake, twenty miles northwest—the priests shot in the church and the church burned over their bodies. Dickens had been a year or so in charge of Pitt. He went there before the signs of war became obvious. He came to Canada because he was something of a rover and because in those days it was the fashion for adventurous young Englishmen to join the force in the out-post land.

*The Book-Lover* has published an historic note regarding this Dickens episode in Canada, entitled "The First Gold Watch of Charles Dickens": "Francis Jeffrey Dickens, third son of the novelist, came to Canada shortly after his father's death in 1870. He remained some time in Toronto, then went to the Northwest, and in 1874 secured an appointment as Inspector in the Mounted Police. During the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, it was reported in England that Inspector Dickens had been killed by Indians in an attack on Fort Pitt, of which he had charge. This, however, was not correct. He held his position in the Mounted Police until invalided from the service on March 1st, 1886, and died at Moline, Illinois, on June 11th of the same year. The first gold watch owned by Charles Dickens was in the possession of Francis Jeffrey Dickens and was brought by him to Canada. Before going west he became acquainted with Mr. F. M. Midford, of Toronto, and this acquaintance afterwards developed into a warm friendship. On his return to Toronto some years later, it came about one day that, being in want of money, Dickens said he must sell the watch. Mr. Midford promptly declared his readiness to furnish the cash needed and his unwillingness to see such a relic pass into the hand of a stranger. 'It was my father's first gold watch,' said Dickens, 'and I'd much rather see it yours, Midford, than a stranger's.' After the death of Mr. Midford in 1891, the Dickens watch passed to his sister, Mrs. Hadwen, from whom it was purchased by her brother, Mr. William Midford, of the Methodist Book Room. The watch remained in Mr. William Midford's possession until 1902, when Mr. E. S. Williamson became its owner."

Born in London, Inspector Dickens must have sat and regaled his men with reminiscences of the great town pictured in his father's books. From London to Fort Pitt was precisely like London to Siberia. Pitt was so far away on the map of Canada that Dickens the elder had probably never even heard of it. It was about midway between Duck Lake, where the war began, and Edmonton, which was the northernmost end of it. All the redcoats that went up from the east got to Fort Pitt the last place of all. Steele's scouts reached it in the latter part of May. Middleton's men got there in July as may be noted from the illustration of birch bark



"Flogging out the fires in full view of the camp above and the fire-fiends below."

drawn and written by Sergeant Kitchener weeks after the last gun was fired at Batoche, Riel captured and Big Bear routed at Loon Lake in the far north with his remnant of the captivity.

Dickens and his men understood that they were very far off; that by the swift turn of the wheel—in the dark as it were—they were suddenly in a jackpot with a thousand savages camped on the long, bush-cropped bank above; the restless Crees who had thirst-danced and burned and looted and massacred at Frog Lake, and then swung their shuffling caravans across the hills to the wooden stockade with its thirty police and as many traders, women and children.

Pitt was the only hope thereabouts; a forlorn hope; a stockade of wood bullet-marked and knife-hacked by Indians; there where the York boats fetched up the goods from York Factory and drifted down the furs to Hudson's Bay. Here were twenty houses or so; stables and blacksmith shop;

stores and powder magazine; one flapping red flag—H. B. C. And the thirty redcoats huddled under that flag with Inspector Dickens were wanted very badly by a thousand redskins camped above; there for days and weeks with their carts and cattle and ponies and loot; their smoking tepees—their bales of hay and barrel of coal-oil.

Here was a picture for the elder Dickens with his mastery of the language of suspense; the lingering uncertainty of profound isolation. As placid an old fort as ever smoked into a solitude; men, women and children and police cut off by weeks of journey from the nearest redcoat column; in the stone magazine plenty of powder; a store full of guns; horses a couple of score; buckboards and carts and wag-gons; all the means of fighting and of escaping—but nowhere to escape except into an open lone land of prowling redskins, and no use in the world to fight. Night after night the Saskatchewan unlocked its ice-gates and started to crackle and thud down the long thousand-mile gorge to Lake Winnipeg; morning after morning the bare hills of April peered over the stockade into the huddle of peaked-up, wooden roofs with their spires of hopeful, shuddering smokes—and still the smokes of those tepees above on the long bank; the patient Crees who had thirst-danced and painted and murdered and now wanted nothing so well as thirty redcoats under the son of the man who wrote Christmas stories for white folks.

But fifteen years before the elder Dickens had written lines describing the placid beauty of his home upon Gad's Hill where his room hung amid boughs and twittering birds; and in that peaceful literary home this inspector of police had lived before ever he heard of Fort Pitt. He must have been a baby in the house where Dickens wrote the Christmas Carol. Well—he felt much like a baby at Fort Pitt. So did they all. There was no other way to feel: hemmed in and cut off and with nothing to do but wait and wonder what the Crees would do next—and when they would do it. Not by day; for the police guns were too much feared by the Indians and there were eyes in the wooden stockade.

The river began to drift away white and restless under the stockade; getting out and away—but the garrison of Fort Pitt stayed in; at night the sentries at the bastions; most of the inhabitants unable or unwilling to sleep; hearing noises in the silence;

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"In the grey of an April dawn they let the scow sheer away into the ice, and began the six-day drift from Fort Pitt to Battleford."