

A Great Pathfinder

Striking Career of a Man Who Governed the Yukon

By HENRY J. WOODSIDE

AN able, honest and distinguished career suffered an untimely end, when ex-Governor William Ogilvie, of Yukon, literally died in harness at the Winnipeg General Hospital on the 12th of November.

After an unsuccessful venture in a Yukon dredging company, in which he "lost all but honour," he had for a couple of years past been conducting the very important work of reporting on the water-powers of the Albany and Saskatchewan Rivers, whose latent potentialities for Canada are as great as the wealth of the Klondike goldfields. While there his usual prophetic foresight outlined a plan whereby about five million acres of first-class land could be readily reclaimed; and on this he made a valuable and practical report to the Government.

About a year ago, while at Le Pas, near the mouth of the Saskatchewan, he suffered from what he believed to be ptomaine poisoning. On his return to Ottawa he was much troubled through the winter with the effects almost leading to a critical operation; but feeling better in the spring, he insisted on resuming work. This ended in his illness in the Winnipeg River district, and subsequent removal to Winnipeg, when it was too late.

Born near Ottawa, he took up the profession of surveying, and entered the service of the Government, where he became one of our most noted explorers and pathfinders. By Sir John A. Macdonald he was sent on important missions affecting Provincial and Dominion boundaries, which were executed with promptitude, thoroughness and economy.

When the Canada-Alaska boundary began to loom up in the middle eighties, he was sent to report on the strip of disputed territory bordering on the North Pacific Ocean, and adjacent islands. He explored the mountain ranges between Taku inlet and Lynn Canal. For this innocent but painstaking service he was rewarded by a broadside from the hysterical and lying press of Seattle and San Francisco, whose total lack of veracity and common sense cannot be better illustrated than by a perusal of their articles, calling on the U. S. Government to prevent that man Ogilvie from stealing the strip, or of fortifying its passes with artillery.

IN 1887 Mr. Ogilvie was sent into Yukon territory to begin delimitation of the 141st meridian, the established boundary between Canada and Alaska. The discovery of coarse gold had attracted some hundreds of miners to the Forty-mile River, but as it rises in Alaska and flows through Canadian territory for about 30 miles before joining the Yukon River, it was necessary to ascertain where the boundary ran through the gold-fields, to prevent clashes of authority.

Although Mr. Ogilvie had to abandon most of the proper, but heavy, appliances for astronomical observation, he adapted local aids so well, and did his work so thoroughly that his line was accepted by the U. S. authorities for twenty years. The observations made in 1907 by two clever young astronomers, F. A. McDiarmid and W. C. Jaques, of the Dominion Observatory, showed that his line was only a few hundred feet out, and that was in Canada's favour, as it should be.

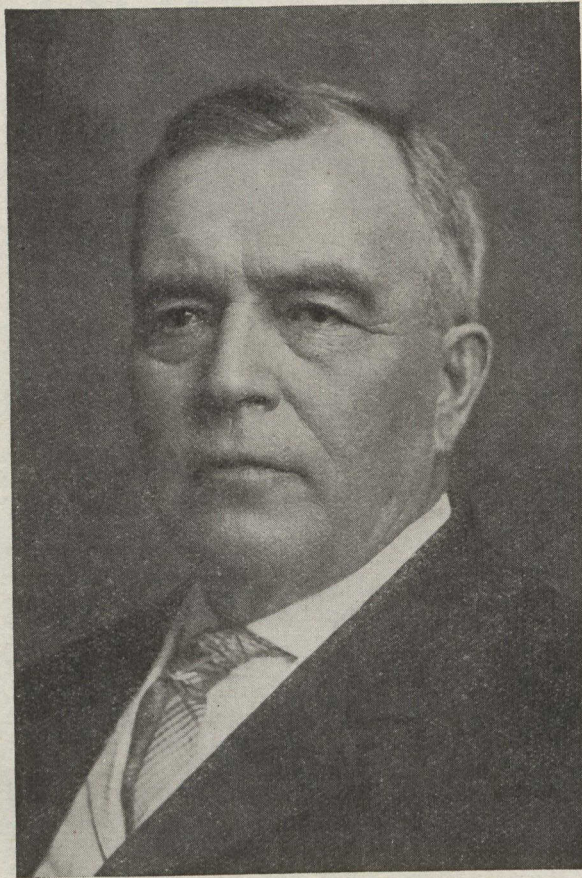
Mr. Ogilvie was doing this fine work with his small instrument clamped on a tree stump clinging to a slope, which persisted in shifting slightly with varying temperatures. Many of the observations were taken at night in a temperature of from 20 to 55 degrees below zero; and when after two hours of tense and motionless work, alternately watching stars chase each other across the hair wires of his telescope and the flying seconds hand of his chronometer, his own hands were usually paralyzed with cold. Also that he had only one chronometer, that there are five ticks to each second, and each tick means a difference of about 1,000 feet, and with other crude appliances, and remoteness from telegraphic connection twenty-five years ago, we can form a faint idea of the wonderful accuracy of his observations and deductions.

After accomplishing the work he was sent to do, and having had much intercourse with the scattered miners, he left on the 17th of March, 1888, by snow-shoe, and later by canoe, on his great trip of over 2,500 miles down the Yukon, across the divide and thence up the Mackenzie to Edmonton; later to Winnipeg and Ottawa, where he reported in January, 1889. Most of this trip was through an unexplored and uninhabited land.

After another short but perilous trip up the Taku inlet, in the end of November, 1894, where years of hardships were crowded into a few weeks, amid the storms, driving ice, and snowy desolation there, Mr. Ogilvie was sent in the summer of 1895 to Yukon again to prolong his international line. He remained in the territory until the summer of 1897.

When Robert Henderson, of Pictou, Nova Scotia, followed his discovery of gold in creeks in the Indian River Valley, 1894-95, by a richer discovery on Gold Bottom-Hunker Creek in the Klondike Valley in June-July, 1896, a stampede followed; and as Mr. Ogilvie says, there were parties of miners scouring the country in August looking for the new find. The Carmac-"Snookum Jim" and "Cultus Charlie" party went there to stake, by Henderson's invitation to the whiteman, George W. Carmac.

On their return, "Snookum Jim" stumbled on a find of coarse gold on what is now Bonanza Creek. Almost simultaneously a party of miners headed by Monahan, in crossing Bonanza on their way to Henderson's, also found gold, some miles below the others. In ignorance of the other discovery they staked there, and some time later at a meeting



The Late Wm. Ogilvie—Big Man Who Had a Big Job.

of twenty-five miners who had come from all parts hunting for Henderson's find, held a miners' meeting, named the creek Bonanza, its tributary Eldorado, and decided to remeasure the claims with a rope, which had been shortened some ten feet by one of the party.

Claim jumping followed, and when in the autumn some holes had been sunk to bedrock, about thirty feet, and the real riches of Bonanza began to be apparent, trouble and bloodshed was in sight, as a majority of the miners were from the western states and were not used to Canadian law and order. The North West Mounted Police were still about seventy miles away at Fortymile and were few in number.

MR. OGILVIE had gone up to the Dawson town-site to lay it out, and some miners remembered that here was the man who had surveyed their claims along the international boundary. Petitions containing 130 names were handed to him, asking him to survey the creek. This work he prosecuted free of charge through the dead of an Arctic winter.

He was warned that he might be shot if he attempted to trespass on the claims of some claim jumpers, but the bad men were soon won over by this honest, resolute, but genial man, who was doing his work with absolute impartiality and honesty. His decisions were accepted without dispute, and

no funerals followed, although in one case he surveyed his temporary host off his jumped claim.

Presents he would not accept, nor pay, except a nugget or two from claim owner friends; though in one case he was almost compelled to accept two pans of gravel from a rich claim. He panned out about \$110 (since exaggerated to over \$400), and in their presence put it into a small glass bottle, sealed it up, and so it has since remained.

Had he not been absolutely fair and honest he had many chances to have staked and held very rich ground, during the survey. This was particularly the case in what is known as the Dick Lowe fraction of 86 feet, which produced over \$400,000 of gold. Mr. Ogilvie became aware of this fraction while surveying near discovery, and fully aware of the richness of the claims on either side. He would not stake it himself, and he would not give any information to Lowe, who was working for him at the time, and sought his advice as to staking it. Lowe had to leave his service before he could stake the claim.

Again, he became aware of the Clarence Berry fraction, where all the work of four claims had been done on the forty-four feet which was not known to exist between two of the claims, and about \$130,000 of gold already lay in the dumps, which would become the property of whoever first guessed the secret and staked the fraction. Most carefully he warned Berry of his danger, and then through a skilful ruse instructed a friend of B— how to stake the ground properly and record it. Byrne, the friend, was handsomely rewarded, but as usual Mr. Ogilvie would not accept any remuneration for his invaluable assistance.

In 1887 he returned to Ottawa, and in 1898 was induced to accept the commissionership or governorship of Yukon, which had been practically offered to him before and was declined.

During his three years of administration, the most perplexing, strenuous and trying that any Canadian administrator ever had, he brought order and settled conditions out of the chaos following the great rushes of 1897 and 1898, when about forty thousand or more men passed inward to the Klondike region.

He was fortunate in having during the first year the loyal support of such a splendid officer as Col. S. B. Steele, commanding the R. N. W. M. P. in Yukon, until his transfer outside; and all during his term of the faithful and incorruptible services of Dr. J. N. E. Brown, who was his private secretary and also territorial secretary, and later became superintendent of the Toronto General Hospital.

AMID the charges; many of them false—some true; levelled at the government officials of the Klondike, there are three names which shine with undimmed lustre. They are those of William Ogilvie, Samuel B. Steele and Edward S. Busby. The latter occupied the difficult position of Canadian customs officer at Skagway, Alaska. Later he became collector at Dawson and inspector of customs for Yukon, and now is chief inspector of customs for Canada.

The conduct of these men, and some others, re-deemed the name of Canadian officials in the land of gold—and bribes.

Had it not been for the powerful support and invincible prestige of the North West Mounted Police (about 100 scattered through Yukon then), no governor could have held in check for a single day the greed and passions, credulity and corruption in that mob of 25,000 determined gold hunters, drawn from all parts of the world, and reinforced by an army of dancers, prostitutes, gamblers, black-legs and crooks from Seattle and the western states; all chafing at regulations unknown in those slaughter pens—the U. S. mining camps. But a man's life and property and a woman's person were as safe there as in the city of Ottawa, night or day.

That a man who was forced into daily contact with scores of men and women, polished or in the rough, demanding "justice" or plotting for a claim or bribe, should be under suspicion at times, goes without saying; but the slanders whether to injure his character, or as an alleged "joke" have failed to affect his honour. His reiterated resignation was tardily accepted in 1901, and he was succeeded by one of the most competent and honourable men in the North-West: the Hon. Jas. H. Ross.

A short time before his death, Mr. Ogilvie had finished for press a work entitled, "Early Days in Yukon," which details a great deal of his experiences in Yukon up to 1897, and gives a historical sketch of explorations in Yukon, and in the neighbouring territory of Alaska. From long inquiry, thoroughness and a retentive memory he had become the best living authority on that north country, which is displaying to a surprised world a great variety and vast extent of native wealth.