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How our Grandfathers Lived

Or, Glimpses of Canadian Pioneer Life

By Frank Yeigh

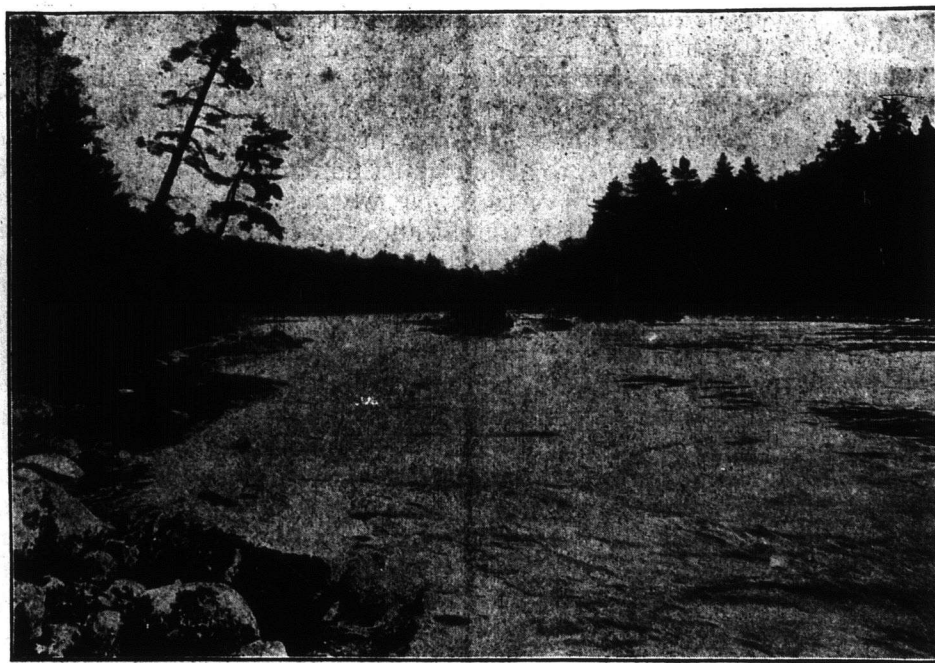
BUT a century has been required to revolutionize the way of living in the English speaking part of Canada. Rural Quebec has felt the revolution to a much less degree, but in Ontario the change from the conditions of life of a hundred years ago has been a radical one. It is, indeed, difficult to realize in this age of rapid transportation, applied science and ready accessibility to the necessities as well as the luxuries of life, that these simpler times of our forebears are not more remote. Goldwin Smith bridged his span of life when, in a reminiscent mood, he was able to say:

"I have talked with a man who talked to the man who was Premier of England in 1801—to Addington about Pitt. I remember the rejoicing in England over the Reform Bill. I remember seeing the farm-buildings near my father's house burned by raiders who opposed the introduction of threshing machines. I recall, as a lad, seeing the servants light the fire with a tinder box. I have seen a man in the stocks. I have heard the curfew. I taught his present Majesty King Edward English History when he was a lad."

stores to speak of, and consequently no bargain days! There was no gas and no such thing as a match; the flint and steel, or the brimstone-tipped pine stick was relied upon for starting the flame. There were no envelopes, no blotting-paper, no steel pens, and the sand box was in requisition to dry the ink; in fact, there was a sad lack of what we in this wiser generation regard as essentials.

But there were compensating advantages: a simplicity and wholesomeness of life that ensured health and length of days; so long a life that an old family record speaks of the "premature" death of a man of 84! There was a rational enjoyment of God's best blessings of nature, a hearty, unaffected social life, and a sound moral sense of right and justice. There was mutual self-help, a hospitality that was not measured by motive, a burdened table of good things where it was bad form to refuse what was offered, no matter what nature's penalty might be. In a word, a sane mode of life was lived that produced strong men and brave women.

Brave in truth were our grandmothers—brave in what they endured in the



The Maligne River. Quetico game and forest reserve. Rainy Lake district. Named Maligne River by Laverandrye, the discoverer of Western Canada, who discovered this canoe highway which was later used by the Government as a route for the bringing in of settlers to Western Canada. On line Canadian Northern Railway.

In like manner there are thousands still living in our own land who have passed through experiences similar to those here related; there are many more, of a later generation, who have had the domestic life of the early nineteenth century brought vividly to mind by these aged eye-witnesses.

The advantages in thus recalling some of the ways in which our grandfathers lived are obvious. The comparison will serve as a basis for estimating the distance we have advanced in little more than two generations. It should, moreover, lead us to recognize more fully the debt we owe to those valiant pioneers for the brave battles they fought under adverse conditions. If Canada should ever have a Hall of Fame or a Roll of Immortals, these humble foundation-builders would deserve a niche equally with the heroes of the battle-field or the leaders of State.

One may further realize the former days by recalling that Canadians of 1800 had no railways, no steamboats, no highways, in the modern sense, no telegraphs or telephones, no harnessed electricity, no "horseless horse cars," no automobiles (thank Heaven!). They were practically without clergymen, doctors, judges or lawyers, and the schoolmaster was not yet abroad in the land. The abundant crop of parliamentary representatives of today (over 700 in all the legislative bodies of Canada) had not then begun to sprout in earnest. There was little money in circulation with which to carry on business; there were no

loneliness and isolation of pioneer life; in the dangers, too, when the weird howl of the hungry wolf was heard in the forest near the clearing, or when the stealthily-stepping Indian would glide like an apparition, unheralded and unannounced, into the log home. Brave were they in the spirit in which sorrows were borne and testing trials met.

The ladies of a century ago did not, fortunately, have to rely upon the fashion-plates of a daily paper. Native feminine talent transformed their limited material into serviceable garments. At first the hides of the fur-bearing animals, obtained from the Indians in barter, were the chief source of clothing supply. One can easily imagine that a rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, well-built lassie of 1800 would, when clad in deer-skin petticoats and skirts and squirrel-skin bonnet, break masculine hearts quite as disastrously as if she had worn creations of a modern modiste. And the utility of a deer-skin petticoat, that could not be torn by a rough journey through the woods, or the turning of a deer-skin suit into a warm bed-cover at night, will commend itself to every feminine descendant of our mothers' mothers.

No fancy-pointed patent shoes dressed their feet, for there were no tanners, and for many a year no shoemaker, until itinerant St. Crispins came on the scene—shoemakers on circuit, like the preacher and the schoolmaster of the early days. They were the days, indeed, when the settler was a many-sided char-

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