

to it a lot of hardship, but if you don't mind that, I'm willing to a partnership."

Garland held out his hand. "It's a bargain!" Then, perhaps a little ashamed of his almost boyish excitement, he explained. "You see, my father-in-law and I were in partnership in the fur business. In fact, the firm is still known as Pearson and Garland. But this last five years he's left it entirely in my hands, while he's been chasing about America and the continent having a good time. And now I feel I have a holiday coming. Don't you think I have?" he said, turning to the older man.

Evidently the two were on great good terms, for the old man smiled good humoredly. "Go if you feel like it," he replied. "I ran the business for many a day, and I'm perfectly capable of doing it again till you come back."

So Haskins made an appointment for a meeting in the morning, and passed on in to supper.

II

Promptly at ten the next morning Haskins arrived at the office of Pearson and Garland, fur buyers. At the conference with Garland which followed, it was decided that the two of them would proceed the next morning to Peace River Crossing, thence by river boat seven hundred miles to Fort Smith. At this point navigation began on the Mackenzie. Well aware that a speedy reaching of their destination was necessary for the success of the expedition, for it was now the fifteenth of June, Haskins suggested attempting a special chartering of the Hudson Bay's steamer "Mackenzie River," operating on the Mackenzie river from Fort Smith to Fort Norman and beyond.

"You see, it's this way," he explained "if we travel on her the ordinary way the trip will take twice as long, for she makes a lot of stops. And right now the main thing is to get in there before they pass the point I'm aiming to reach, and, I'll be honest with you, we ain't got any too much time. Besides, with a special charter, we can be sure of having the steamer meet us in the Fall when we get ready to come out. With the charter giving us full control, we can travel down

in five days at the most. Then we can release her back to the company, say till the end of August. From that date on, she'll wait at Norman for us. We've got to get out of there and be on our way back by the tenth of September at the latest for transportation isn't to be counted on after the middle of the month."

With the suggestion Garland heartily agreed. In fact, though an equal partner in the expedition now contemplated, he was fully aware that its success lay entirely with the big northman.

So they hurried to the District Office of the Hudson Bay's Company, a few blocks away, from which headquarters all fur and transportation business for the Mackenzie river district was directed.

Brisbane, the manager, grizzled veteran of thirty years in company service, was suspicious. The chartering of a company vessel by outside parties suggested to him some profitable venture, and, with true company spirit, he hated to think that anything in the north country in the way of a money making scheme could have been overlooked by himself. So, instead of giving them a direct answer, he stalled, leading the conversation here and there, hinting, suggesting, trying desperately,

with all the guile of thirty years fur trading experience, to learn his visitor's secret.

At last, however, failing, he became once more the autocrat that he was; said gruffly: "Well, three thousand dollars is the lowest price I can give you on the steamer for the requirements you mention." To his immense surprise, Haskins replied: "All right; that's satisfactory. We'll pay cash now, as soon as you sign this contract, and give us an order on the captain of the steamer 'Mackenzie River' at Fort Smith."

With their special charter contract signed, and in possession of an order on Captain Bartlett of the steamer "Mackenzie River," directing him to accept their instructions, Haskins and Garland left the District Office in high good humor, in spite of the somewhat high price they had been forced to pay.

The early morning northland train found them aboard bound for end of steel, two hundred and sixty miles away. From here a stage carried them the intervening forty miles to the frontier settlement of Peace River Crossing, at which point the majestic Peace River flowed northward to connect up with the Slave

that, in turn, joining the Mackenzie formed one of the greatest inland water ways in the world, by which the penetrating of the vast Canadian wilderness was made so quickly and easily possible during the Summer months when navigation was open.

Haskins and Garland arrived at Fort Smith on June twenty-sixth. Hiring six half breeds they quickly transferred their outfit, grub, half a dozen thirty-three rifles and two thousand rounds of ammunition, to the steamer "Mackenzie River" just ready to leave on her trip down river to Fort Norman and beyond.

It was upon the third night after their making camp that Garland was awakened by Haskins softly shaking him. He sat up sharply. Though his wrist watch pointed to two in the morning, it was bright as day, for the sun still hung above the horizon two hours yet from setting.

"What is it?" he questioned, wonderingly.

Smiling, Haskins held up a warning finger. "Listen," he said.

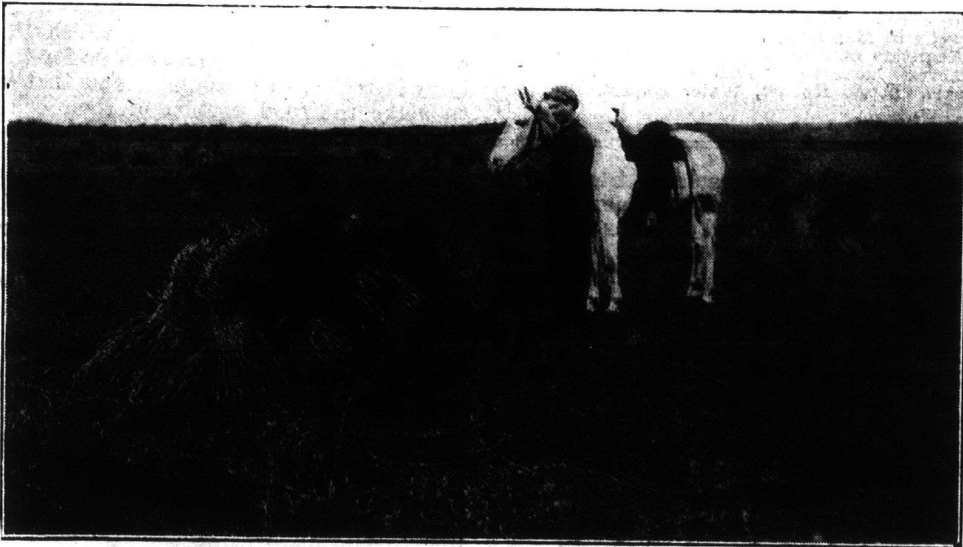
Then to Garland's ears, out of the hanging hush of endless listening distances, came a muffled beating.

For weeks now the stillness of these wilderness reaches had closed around him with a silence so vast and profound that the very soundlessness had seemed to sound—a queer booming note, understandable only to those who have lived in wide places.

But now his straining ears were conscious of a new tuning. Through the quiet air of night it came, a muffled beating, prolonged, steady, growing in volume with every passing second, swelling louder and louder, till all the pregnant night was vibrating, and the earth alive with tremorings as from the onward rushings of a hundred locomotives.

Perhaps five minutes elapsed before Garland—vainly striving to recall where he had heard similar sound—remembered it was like that of five thousand marching soldiers, whom he had watched moving to entrain at Edmonton many months ago.

But now the sound was infinitely louder, more voluminous, a rising diap-



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