

The City of Numbered Days

the point where the river debouches among the low sand-hills of the Buckskin Desert the canyon of the Niquoia measures little more than a mile as the bird flies, though its crookings through the barrier mountains fairly double the distance. Beginning as a broken ravine at the valley outlet, the gorge narrows in its lower third to a cliff-walled raceway for the torrent, and the trail, leaving the bank of the stream, climbs the forested slope of a boundary spur to descend abruptly to the water's edge again at the desert gateway, where the Niquoia, leaping joyously from the last of its many hamperings, becomes a placid river of the plain.

Picking his way judiciously because the trail was new to him, Brouillard came in due time to the descending path among the spruces and scrub-pines leading to the western outlook upon the desert swales and sand-hills. At the canyon portal, where the forest thinned away and left him standing at the head of the final descending plunge in the trail, he found himself looking down upon the explanation of the curious apparition.

None the less, what he saw was in itself rather inexplicable. In the first desert looping of the river a camp-fire of piñon knots was blazing cheerfully, and beside it, with a picnic hamper for a