

# THE UNACCREDITED CORRESPONDENT

By MARSTYN POLLOUGH POGUE

“NORTH of Forty-six” runs the old Canadian proverb, “wherever the spruce grows and water runs there is fur to catch; wherever there is fur to catch there are trappers; and wherever there are trappers there is always a Hudson’s Bay Company’s trading-post.”

There is more truth in this than in most proverbs. In a thousand spots all over the vast Canadian wilderness the great company buys fur cheap to sell it dear in London. But in the far north the posts are widely scattered. They are hundreds of miles apart.

Few, mother-forgotten, and lonely, the recluses who are buried alive in these isolated posts pass their dull and wearisome lives in the monotonous labor which saves them (with a few exceptions) from lunacy and suicide.

John Cameron, the factor of Missabe House, was one of the exceptions. He is dead now; he abolished his life with a razor in the North-West Mounted Police barracks at Dawson a year ago. There is only the vivid memory of the result of his acting as the representative of a big syndicate which feeds a thousand papers in the United States and Canada with news, after the shadow had fallen upon his mind.

From Missabe House he flashed to this syndicate the greatest “fake” story that ever was put on the wire, and the syndicate fed the story to its hungry papers as a news story, and the result was an exodus.

On a map of Canada you can find with your forefinger the place where Missabe House stands in the north-western angle of the District of Athabasca.

The single wire of the Great North-Western Telegraph Company, which connects Dawson, the isolated capital of the Yukon District, with the rest of the world passes within a hundred yards of Missabe House. Strung taut between its poles, twanging and

whining while the wind mourns in the spruce forest or chants a requiem in the long grass, this vibrant thread of wire stretches over two thousand miles of wilderness.

In his youth, before he had entered the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Cameron had been a telegraph operator, and he had not forgotten the language of the sounder, and still remembered how to talk with the key, for he had a retentive memory.

So, two years ago, when the telegraph company’s men passed Missabe House, planting the poles and stringing the wire, Cameron, who was watching them, said to himself: “By the great Morse, I’ll cut in on that wire, and I’ll be amused, entertained, and diverted, listening to the stuff they send over it.” And, as soon as he could, he sent to Winnipeg for enough wire for his purpose, and instruments and apparatus.

For six dreary months he waited impatiently, looking at the Dawson wire every day with a thirsty longing in his eyes. A cloud was beginning to gather in his brain, and his desire to hear what was passing over that wire rowelled him.

When the coil of wire and the instruments came up from Winnipeg he made a connection with the Dawson wire and installed the instruments in his office in the factory. Then the sounder began its cheerful clicking, and he listened, filled with delight. The operator was sending in a leisurely way and he got most of it, although he was out of practice, of course.

But, in spite of his new diversion, the cloud inside Cameron’s brain grew larger, and its shadow darkened his mind. The two other white exiles of Missabe House, for whom the weeks dragged on like months and the months seemed as long as years, noticed the leap and flare of a strange light in Cameron’s eyes. “The old man’s getting daffy,” remarked Boal, the trader, to Anderson, the clerk.