

Mad Phil Mawes—A Story of Saskatchewan

By John E. Hargreaves

"TELL you what, boys, I wouldn't be out on the prairie to-night for a thousand dollars! It's twenty-five below, and a snorter of a blizzard blowing," and the speaker, who had just entered the room in the unpretentious building serving as postoffice, general store and meeting place for all the gossips of the little western village, shook the snow from his fur coat and cap and took up a position in close proximity to the roaring stove, around which a half-dozen or so of farmers, villagers and "bummers" were already seated.

"It's a freezer, all right, and I, fer one, am mighty glad I've only ter go ter the next block fer my bed this night," spoke

"It happened in the eighties, as I sed; one of the hardest winters I ever seen, and I hev bin in the west more'n thirty years.

"That year I hed bin knockin' around all over the country, and doin' most any kind of a job that come along. The fall found me in K—, a little one-horse place in Saskatchewan, and I wus cursin' my luck fer leadin' me ter sich a forsaken hole, when I dropped acrost a fellow one day in the only saloon in the town.

"Hev a drink," sez he, by way of interducin' himself. 'I guess I will,' sez I, namin' my poison ter the barkeeper.

"Stranger in these parts, eh?" he went on, flingin' a five-spot acrost the bar.

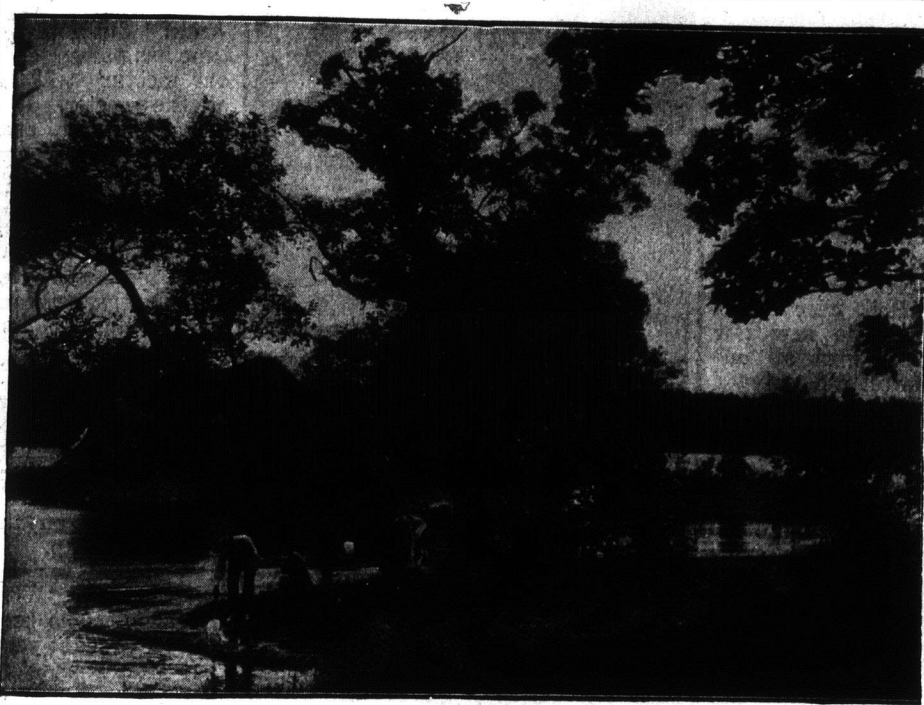
"Yes," sez I, as I poured the whisky down.

"Well, my name's Phil Mawes," the fellow sez, sippin' outer his glass. 'I keep bach on my place, twelve miles south, and I would like ter get hold of someone ter help me look arter a hundred head this winter. If yer'll come I'll give yer good money. Fill up yer glass and think over it.'

"Well, boys, ter cut things short, it took four glasses ter help me think matters out, and then I concluded I might do worse than take a spell on a farm. So I got my traps tergether, and left town with Mawes fer his place. Phil hed one of the slickest places yer ever clapt eyes on—stables, all built in a bunch, and



Camp Life, Rainy Lakes



Pithers Point, near Fort Francis, Ont. C.N.Ry.

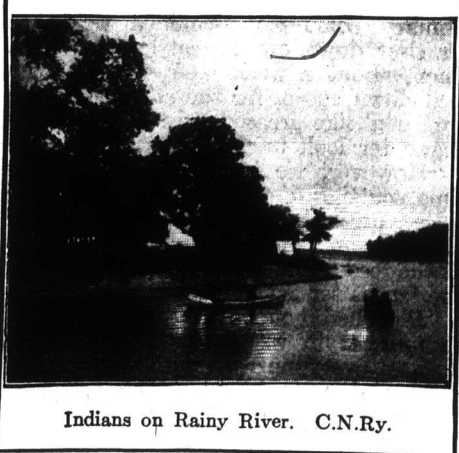
up a voice, the owner of which sat with both feet elevated on the fuel box, and his chair tilted back at an angle which strained its two back legs to creaking point.

"Aye, yer're right," exclaimed a third member of the group, a big hulking shanty-man from the camps away north, and a stranger, evidently, to the rest.

"I oughter hev taken the trail ter the camp ter-night, but I guess I'll wait till this blows is-self out. Geel how it does snort," as an unusually strong blast screeched around the building, rattling the stove pipes in the chimney and whirling through every minute crevice around the door frame streams of snow, dry and fine as powder. "Sich a night as this," the stranger went on, "reminds me of that record cold winter, back in the eighties, when I wus baching it on the farm with Phil Mawes, who gev me this in 'membrance of him, as the tombstones say." Here the speaker pushed back his cap and revealed a long, deep scar across his forehead.

"Tell us the yarn, boss," cried several voices in unison, while the postmaster and storekeeper combined, whose attention had been divided between his duties and the words of the stranger, exclaimed: "Yes, let's have the story! It's closing time, but I don't mind keepin' open if you'll tell us the yarn," and he tossed more wood into the stove and seated himself among the group.

"Well, boys," began the stranger, "I'm not much at spinnin' a yarn, but seein' as yer want the story I guess I'll et yer hev it.



Indians on Rainy River. C.N.Ry.

hay and straw piles around 'em fer a wind-break. His house wus built about thirty rod away, and all done up in style—paper and picters on the walls, carpets and ilecloth on the floor, and a pianner in the parlor.

"When I hed bin with him about a week he kinder let things out a bit, and told me he wus goin' ter get married in the spring. He hed known the girl fer years in the Old Country, and when he concluded he'd come out here ter get rich quicker, she told him she would wait fer ever fer him.

"He had blanked bad luck arter gettin' here, and twelve years slipped away afore he found himself able ter send fer the girl.

"That's her futtergraft," sez he, pointin' ter a big pickter over the pianner,

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