

THEY LIVE OBSCURE LIVES

Facts Regarding Hudson Bay Company's Agents

Indians Their Only Associates for Many Months—Company Prefers Married Men.

You who complain of the loneliness of a suburban home, who chafe at the solitude of rural life, or die of ennui if left to your own society for an afternoon, what would you do if your lot were cast in the midst of a dense wilderness, where newspapers are unknown, and even the sight of a white man an event of years? Unbearable, you would say. Yet under conditions like these are white people born, spend their childhood, grow to manhood and womanhood, transact the business of life and die, and some of them never get even a sight of the wonders of what is to us a commonplace world. Nor are they unhappy, for unclayed by the super-refined means by which we are accustomed to satisfy our cravings for amusement, they learn to live more within themselves and enjoy as fully their simple lives.

Because ladies must have furs, and commercial companies must have gold, the representatives of trading companies must live in the far reaches of the northern wilderness, and exchange what pleases the eye or appetite of the savage for what pleases the fancy of fashionable ladies, and collect from each a liberal margin of profit.

The Hudson Bay Company, who have a practical monopoly of the fur trade of Canada, look far into the future. Not only do they want capable representatives for today, but wish to insure a perpetuation of servants who have been educated to the business. Consequently when they sent a trader to take charge of a remote post, they prefer that he take a wife with him. In a few years, having severed all connections with the outside world, except for his semi-annual report to and instructions from his company at Winnipeg, he loses the thread of current events and forgets the great outside world of which he has ceased to be a part. His children, who have nothing to forget, adapt themselves more easily to conditions, and stories of city streets and railroads are as vague and fairy like to them as Mother Goose or Alice in Wonderland are to the child of our modern civilization.

It was at the trading post of Hudson's Hope on the Peace river that we met young Gardner. He was a young man of 25 years. His features and good English proclaimed him to be a white man, but his dress and habits were those of the Indian. He also spoke two or three Indian languages with the fluency of the tribesmen. His log house was fitted up comfortably. There were two rooms. One was the kitchen where George, his constant Indian companion, cooked his meals; the other was his parlor, sitting room and bed room. In the corner was a rude couch on which was a profusion of fur robes. Fur rugs decorated the floor of the room, and hanging on the wall with an assortment of fire arms, were the monster claws of a grizzly bear. He showed them with a good deal of pride and told how an Indian was marked for life before the ferocious beast was killed.

He told us the short story of his life while we sat on the robes of his couch. He was born at Fort Chippewyan on Lake Athabasca, and his father was an old servant of the company. At this post he passed his boyhood and received an education at the mission. He hunted and fished with the Indian lads of his own age and assisted about the trading post. As soon as his age warranted, he was transferred to Lesser Slave Lake post as clerk and here he lived his first romance and met with his first disappointment. He fell in love with a pretty half breed girl. It was all right as long as he confined his love making to moonlight walks; there was nothing said even when his growing pre-occupation showed itself in his negligence of business, but when he announced that he wanted to marry the girl the blow fell. Perhaps on the recommendation of his father, the company absolutely refused to sanction the match. When he persisted, they transferred him 350 miles back into the wilderness to the lonely spot where we found him. He had neither forgiven nor forgotten. He emphatically stated he would not stay there another season. Unless they gave him another charge he would quit the company. "But this is the only life I know," he said regretfully. "You people have the advantage of me in civilization. Here

I can make a living, but what can I do on the outside?" His knowledge of the outside world was confined to his mission learning, gleanings from what printed matter found its way into the interior, and a brief visit he had made to the frontier town of Edmonton at one time in his life. "But I am pretty good friends with the Indians here, and they tell me stories of gold back here in the mountains," he added confidently. "As soon as the spring checking-up is over, this post will close for the summer and I am going over with them. I would like to get a thousand or so together before 1900 because I intend to go to the Paris exposition. You are going there, of course?"

Even if he realized his hopes and attended the great exposition as he planned, it would be safe to wager that he is again in the seclusion of the forest and in the employment of the company in whose service he was born. That is the experience of others.

It was under similar circumstances that the Camsell boys reached manhood. Their father is chief factor for the company in the Mackenzie river country and has his headquarters at Fort Simpson. His two boys were given a thorough schooling, and finally sent outside to one of the eastern Canadian universities. They graduated with honors, and after having seen and mingled with the society of the civilized world, with any of the professions open to them, they voluntarily returned to their home on the Arctic slope. They are destined no doubt to fill high positions in the company's service.

Similar in some respects, but different in others is the case of Peter Gunn, who with his wife and four children, keep the trading post at St. John on the Peace river. Mr. Gunn was not born in the service, but is a native of Scotland, which place he left some years ago with his wife and infant daughter Bessie, to take charge of this lonely spot. Here he has since lived, and here were his other children born.

Like the faithful servant which he is, he was completely engrossed with the affairs of his company, cultivating the good will of the Indians, that they should not take their catch of fur to any of the free traders established thereabout, outfitting the best of the hunters and trappers for the winter's fur gathering, keeping up the supply of trading merchandise and properly caring for the furs brought in by the hunters. In thus endeavoring to show a large profit balance for his post at the spring audit, his time and interest were monopolized, and the loneliness of his surroundings passed unnoticed.

Nor is the case of his wife much different, for busied with the maternal and housekeeping worries which occupy the mind of all housewives during waking hours, it is doubtful if the good mother missed any of the environments of society. There are women even in our largest cities who are as completely though unconsciously isolated. To them there is no life outside of the walls of their own home, and what does it matter if in the ears of the one is the rumbling and clanging of a city's traffic, telling of the complexity of men's efforts, while in the ears of the other is the rustling of leaves and rippling of waters, telling of a peace which is to be found nowhere on earth? For here, just as in all other places, the bread will burn in the oven, and Johnny will stub his toe and run crying to his mother to be comforted.

To little Bessie, who was now a winsome lass of 6, it would seem that the place would be oppressive, for her mind was not taken up with the troubles and business of life, and her young, impulsive spirit demanded expansion and action. But it was not so. Old Rover was her playmate. She pulled old Rover's tail, and in old Rover's ear she poured her childish confidences or hopes and fears, and who shall say she was not understood? Unhampered by the multiplicity of themes which divide the infantile mind, she made remarkable progress in the only life she knew. She spoke perfect English with just a delightful suggestion of the withered Scotch accent, but not more perfectly than she spoke the language of the Cree Indians. Contiguous to the Cree is the Beaver tribe whose language has proven a stumbling block to almost every white man who tried to master it. Yet she speaks it with a fluency that makes her invaluable to her father as an interpreter, and endears her to every member of the savage tribe.

If you speak of birthday parties or children's matinees, she would not understand, but she knows the difference between a beaver and a marten skin and can tell you just what is the value and can tell you just what is the value of a silver fox. She knows little of the geography of the world, but she knows every bush, hill and valley about the little fort, and can tell you where every outgoing trail leads. All she remembers of her life has been at this point, except one time the winter be-

fore, her father took her down river in the Hudson Bay Company canoe to the spring accounting at Dunvegan.

We wanted a pair of moccasins. Bessie knew just where we could get them and offered to guide us. She led the way over a trail she knew so well to an Indian's low, dark cabin. She entered unceremoniously, and was greeted cordially, and because we came with her, we were made welcome. She stated our errand, and the moccasins were produced. She looked at them critically and handed them back with a few words in Indian. Another pair was brought out and her sharp eyes detected that one of the binding things was inconveniently short. A longer one was fitted in, and after a satisfied examination she handed them to us, saying, "This pair is all right."

Under her guidance we started back, but found that this business woman of 6 was but a child after all, for as we were fairly started on the trail, she turned back and said simply: "I'm tired, won't you carry me?"—Sidney Church.

The Stones Burned.

In 1768 Philip Ginler, the discoverer of coal at Summit Hill, near Mauch Chunk, lived in a rough cabin in the forests on the Mauch Chunk mountain. While in quest of game for his family, whom he had left at home without food of any kind, his foot struck a black stone. By the roadside not far from the town of Summit Hill he built a fire of wood and threw pieces of the supposed stone about it so that the embers might last longer while he was roasting a fowl. He was surprised after a little while to see the stones glow and retain their heat for a long time. He carried a lot of the coal home and burned it there. The few neighbors soon learned of the discovery, but there was no mining to any extent in Carbon county until after the war of 1812 had begun.—Ex.

An Old Custom.

Why is it the duty of the bride to cut the wedding cake? The fact is—at least so a professor told me the other day—that the Romans are at the bottom of it. The original Roman marriage was effected by the simple process of the bride and bridegroom breaking a cake of bread and eating it together. This developed into the bride cake, and the bride cut it because it was the duty of the woman to prepare food for the man. Young brides of today who think it the height of ill luck not to cut their own wedding cake are probably not in the least aware of what they are symbolically pledging themselves to, but they had better bear in mind that if they wish to keep a man in a good temper they must not forget to feed him.—Ex.

Rural England a Land of Song.

The love of song is strong as ever among the agricultural folk of England, and at the harvest home supper there is always plenty of melody of a sort, says a London newspaper. The old ballads and songs of the peasantry as found in broadsides and manuscripts are full of character. In the great majority of cases the authorship of these poems is unknown. One of the old favorites for recitation at country festivals used to be a dialogue between a husbandman and a serving man, and Mr. Bell in his collection of poems and ballads says he heard this on one occasion recited at Selborne by two countrymen, who gave it with considerable humor and dramatic effect. They delivered it in a kind of chant or recitation.

Why Did They Miss?

Hunters' tales rarely make mention of poor shots and failures, and a story which depicts the remarkable success of some famous shots in California a few years ago is therefore all the more interesting. The narrator, Mr. Frank Murray, terms the incident the one marvelous tale in his book, "Mountains and Molehills." In former times it would have passed for a miracle. Three of us were out at midday in search of venison in the Santa Rosa valley. The sky was cloudless and the sun blazing hot. Making for a shady thicket, we unexpectedly started a doe in the long grass. She was out of range before we could raise a gun, but there still remained a fawn. The pretty innocent thing stood perfectly still, gazing at us. Our larder was bare, and we could not afford to be merciful.

The fawn stood motionless as I advanced a few paces and took, as I fancied, a deadly aim. I missed, and still it did not move. The others fired and missed also.

From the same distance, about 75 yards, we fired each four bullets without success. Still the fawn moved but a pace or two, and our rifle ammunition was exhausted.

I then crept up to the fawn and within 20 paces fired twice at it with my pistol. Then, unharmed, it quietly walked away in search of its mother.

We looked at each other in surprise.

Fourteen shots within 70 paces of a motionless deer! "Well, I'll be hanged!" was one man's comment. "Crack shots!" We could not explain it, unless the rarefaction of the air had made the deer seem nearer than it was.—Ex.

Curious Medical Case.

A curious case occurred in one of the Paris hospitals which excited much comment in medical circles. Some time ago a woman named Legros, 55 years of age, was found lying in the road in a state of insensibility and absolutely rigid. She was removed by the police to the hospital, where for three weeks she remained in the same state. The doctors then decided that she was dead and had been so since she was found, the preservation of her body being due to the amount of alcohol she had imbibed.—Ex.

Wrong Diagnosis.

A song with the title "There's a Sigh in the Heart" was sent by a young man to his sweetheart, but the paper fell into the hands of the girl's father a very unscientific physician, who exclaimed "What wretched, unscientific stuff is this? Who ever heard of such a case?"

He wrote on the outside: "Mistaken diagnosis; no sigh in the heart possible. Sighs relate almost entirely to the lungs and diaphragm!"—Ex.

Curlers Will Curl.

There will be no game on the curling rink tonight but tomorrow night the first round in the grand challenge competition will be begun, the skips being Gross vs. Scott and Wilson vs. Hingston. Wednesday night the battle will be between Lithgow vs. Stewart and Wills vs. Rourke; Thursday night, Walsh vs. Rouquay.

The drawing for place in the second round of the competitive play will be held Wednesday night after the game.

Awful Bush Fires.

Vancouver, B. C., Jan. 25.—The destruction by bush fires in Australia, according to the mail advices by the steamship Aorangi, have been appalling, while many people are dropping dead from heat apoplexy, the thermometer running up to 115 and 120 in the shade. Hundreds upon hundreds of families have been burnt out, some of the country residences destroyed being very costly structures.

Many marvelous rescues were made. One man in a farmer's wagon drove 169 persons from the fire circle and sure

death, three miles away to a river. Here they all remained immersed with their mouths and noses above water until the terrific hoocaust had passed over them. They breathed through wet blankets during the passing of the fire. Scores of miles of grain have been destroyed and great droves of sheep and cattle.

Notice is hereby given that an application will be made to the parliament of Canada, at the next session thereof for an act to amend the act respecting the Dawson City Electric Company, Ltd., and to extend the time limited for the commencement and completion of the electric railway and tramway by said last mentioned act authorized to be constructed.

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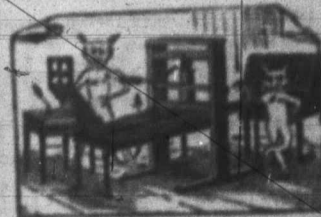
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