



# Our Canadian Guide

A Resumé of the Virile Part He has Played  
in the Development of Our Nation.

By John Murray Gibbon \*

**A** HUNDRED miles or so north of the city of Quebec, Joe was paddling our canoe back to camp along the shore of Lake Edward from an inlet sacred to trout.

His stroke was leisurely but always rhythmical, and after a while he began to hum. It might have been a Stabat Mater but, when eventually the words did come, they were the words of a folk-song. Verse followed verse, sung in a soft deep voice of rich and resonant timbre. I caught a phrase or two sufficient to remember, and that night in camp elicited the rest. Four verses give the character:

Petit rocher de la haute montagne,

Je viens ici finir cette campagne:  
Ah! doux échos, entendez mes soupirs;  
En languissant je vais bientôt mourir!

Petits oiseaux, vos harmonies,  
Quand vous chantez, me rattachent à la vie,  
Ah! si j'avais des ailes comme vous,  
Je s'rais heureux avant qu'il fut deux jours!

Seul en ces bois, que j'ai eu de soucis!  
Pensant toujours à mes si chers amis,  
Je demandais: 'Hélas! sont-ils noyés?'  
Les Iroquois les auraient-ils tués?

C'est donc ici que le monde m'abandonne!  
Mais j'ai secours en vous, Sauveur des hommes!  
Très Sainte Vierge, ah! m'abandonnez pas,  
Permettez-moi d'mourir entre vos bras.

## LITERARY CANADIANS "SNAPPED" ON WESTERN TOUR



John Murray Gibbon, popular Canadian author receiving a "pointer" from Bliss Carman, Canadian poet and, apparently, enjoying the experience

The song was known to Joe as *La Plainte de Cadieux*, and when I had finished transcribing he told me its history. It is the oldest poem recorded as having been written in Canada.

Two hundred years ago, before the English had captured Quebec, Cadieux was an interpreter, guide, voyageur, who accompanied fur trading expeditions up the Ottawa river under the licences or *congés* issued by the French king. He had spent the winter hunting, trapping and trading, and with his party was encamped on Calumet Island, at the portage above the rapids. Word came from a friendly Indian that the Iroquois were on the war-path and were lying in ambush. No one hitherto had run these rapids, but if someone could distract the enemy's attention while the attempt was made, here was a forlorn hope. Cadieux, with a young Algonquin, undertook the diversion, firing shots in rapid succession, while the rest of the party dared the perilous descent.

This they made in safety, but Cadieux never rejoined them. After the Iroquois had gone they found his body in a shallow grave, hands over his breast, covered with branches, a cross erected at his head. The guide had driven off the Iroquois, but had been mortally wounded, with strength enough left only to dig his own grave. Before he died he had inscribed on a strip of birch bark this death-song, which a hymn tune had made popular. Among the French-Canadian guides Cadieux is an epic figure, their Achilles or Odysseus, their legendary hero, and as they paddle along, nearly always to the rhythm of folk-song, this naturally comes to mind.

The story of Cadieux will help not a little to understand the character of the Canadian guide and his place in this northern half-continent. Half-continent is true, for half the area of Canada is lake and river, waterways through her vast forests. The colonists of New France sailed up the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa far into the interior, assimilated with some at least of the aboriginals, canoed and portaged up the Mattawa, over Lake Nipissing, down the French river into the Great Lakes, and were trading on the Mississippi and Missouri while the English colonists to the south were still clinging to their seaboard. The French of to-day seem rooted to their cities or their soil, whereas the Normans of Louis the Fourteenth still had something of the Northman Viking spirit. They were axemen and hunters ripe for the adventurous life offered by the Canadian backwoods.

So attractive was this life that the orderly regime designed by the 'Grand Monarque' for the colonization of New France and the traffic in furs was dissipated. The young men would not stay on their farms, marry the wives sent out to them, work as sub-