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The Overland Journey of the Argonauts of 1862

by

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The Overland Journey of the Argonauts of 1862

By JUDGE F. W. HOWAY, LL.B., F.R.S.C.

(Read May Meeting, 1919)

The earliest recorded emigration across the prairies to the region west of the Rocky Mountains occurred in 1841, and according to Sir George Simpson, who met them near Edmonton, consisted of twenty-three families. Thirteen years later another party, known as the Sinclair party, numbering sixty-five persons—men, women, and children—followed in their tracks to the Columbia. In this paper an attempt will be made to trace and describe the journey in 1862 of the third immigrant party across the continent through British North America; but the first of such immigrants whose object was to reach a home in British territory. For this purpose liberty has been kindly granted by Mrs. Caroline L. McMicking, of Victoria, to use the original diaries of her late husband, Mr. Robert B. McMicking, and his brother, Thomas R. McMicking. These little books contain the day by day account of the incidents of the whole journey from Queenston, Canada West to Quesnel, British Columbia.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway follows, in a general way, the route taken by this party from Winnipeg to Fort George, and covers the distance in three days. We, who travel in luxury at this speed, find it difficult to visualize the slow and steady "grind" of twenty or twenty-five miles a day, the innumerable delays, the constant crossing and re-crossing of rivers and creeks—ferrying, fording, or bridging—the footsoreness, the uncertainties, the wearisomeness, the disappointments and dangers, and the dwarfing sense of man's insignificance that the surrounding vastness impressed upon these pioneers in their four months' crawl across the prairies and the Rocky Mountains. All things are ready-made for the pioneer *de luxe* of to-day; the pioneer of 1862 had to make them for himself.

In 1861 Cariboo had yielded about $2,700,000. Tales of easily-gotten wealth rolled from West to East, and as they rolled they not only increased, but all the asperities vanished leaving with the hearer only a clear vision of gold to be picked up in Cariboo "by the bucketful," as one old-timer used to phrase it. But El Dorado was far distant from Canada West. To reach it by the usual route meant a journey to New York, thence by water to Aspinwall, across the isthmus to Panama, by ship to San Francisco, and on to Victoria, thence by river steamer to Yale, and by stage four hundred miles to

Cariboo. Considering the delay and expense of such a voyage, some twenty-four adventurous young spirits of Queenston and the vicinity, lured by the "yellow root of evil," determined to make the Northwest Passage by land.

Setting out from Queenston on April 23rd, 1862, the first link of the journey was to St. Paul, then a busy little town and rapidly growing, but giving no indication of its future greatness. Their route was by rail and boat to Milwaukee, and thence by rail and river steamer to St. Paul. Here the party transferred to Burbank's stages for Georgetown on the Red River, distant about three hundred and twenty miles in the same general northwesterly direction now traversed by the main line of the Great Northern Railway. The stages travelled fifty or sixty miles a day. Georgetown was at that time the head of navigation on Red River. It had been promised them that the steamer *International* would be ready on May 10th to leave Georgetown on her maiden voyage to Fort Garry. The party had consequently timed their movements to arrive at Georgetown on May 9th, only to find the *International* quite unfinished. After eleven days of watchful (but not patient) waiting it was announced that the steamer would sail on May 20th.

During this enforced delay every stage-coach had brought to Georgetown other adventurers bound for golden Cariboo to swell the waiting list, and when the *International* cast off her lines she carried the original party of twenty-four, now grown to one hundred and fifty or more. Unfortunately the steamer was found ill-suited for the river; though drawing only forty-two inches of water, yet her length, one hundred and fifty feet, rendered her extremely difficult to handle in the tortuous stream. In consequence the trip occupied seven days. Accidents seemed to haunt the *International*. It appeared to be impossible to keep her in the channel. Scarcely had she covered two miles the first day when she ran into the brush that lined the banks, tearing off both her funnels. The following day the engine broke down, and the vessel was run ashore for repairs. The next day, while backing in order to turn a sharp bend, she struck the bank and damaged her wheel. Another day she broke her rudder and ran ashore.

Her Majesty's birthday occurred while the *International* was still in the land of the free. The diary thus succinctly describes the day's celebration: "At twelve o'clock noon, hoisted the stars and stripes; twelve-fifteen hoisted the Union Jack, and immediately after fired a salute and immediately after sang 'God Save the Queen.'" Two days later Fort Garry was reached. Hargrave speaking of that

event says: "The great bulk of the passengers consisted of about 160 Canadians, who had come with the intention of pioneering an overland route across the continent to Cariboo."

From May 26th till June 2nd the emigrants were encamped in the vicinity of Fort Garry, little dreaming that the unearned increment of the land would in thirty years far exceed the total golden harvest of Cariboo. This period was spent in obtaining horses, cattle, and Red River carts for the journey as far as Edmonton, beyond which point the alleged cart trail did not extend. Red River carts have been mentioned by all visitors to that settlement. They are only another instance of man's ability to fabricate serviceable instruments, if compelled by necessity, out of any materials at hand. The Promyschlenski navigated Bering Sea in crazy vessels of green wood fastened with thongs of deer hide in default of nails to secure the planks properly; the pioneers traversed the broad prairies in just as primitive contrivances; for these Red River carts contained not a particle of metal, being composed entirely of wood and hide.

During this interval the travellers had full opportunity to discuss with the Hudson's Bay Company's officials the best mode and route of travel. They had the benefit of the advice of Governor Dallas; Mr. McTavish, the Governor of the settlement; Mr. Christie in charge at Edmonton; Bishop Tache, and, especially, of Timoleon Love and John Whiteford, the guide. The two last named had made the journey frequently and knew the region from experience.

This delay was moreover really necessary for the success of the undertaking. Had everything been ready it would nevertheless have been the part of wisdom to have delayed so as to obtain the advantage of the growth of the grass on the prairies. In truth the emigrants in their eagerness to reach El Dorado had set out three or four weeks too early.

Like all early travellers the party must have a guide. The orthodox guide in western history deserts his post just at the crucial point when his services are most required. Every care was, therefore, taken in the selection. On Bishop Tache's recommendation the choice fell upon Charles Rochette, a French half-breed, who for $100 agreed to conduct the emigrants to St. Ann's, a missionary settlement a few miles west of Edmonton.

The provisions for the journey were purchased at Fort Garry. They were primitive indeed—flour and pemmican. The flour was manufactured at the settlement, and though good and wholesome, was, of course, somewhat dark and coarse; it cost $3.90 for one hundred and twelve pounds. As to pemmican, it is of various degrees of

unattractiveness. The ordinary type, which our travellers obtained, was simply a compound of buffalo meat and grease. Its manufacture is thus described by Milton and Cheadle: "The meat having been dried in the sun or over a fire in thin flakes, is placed in a dressed buffalo skin and pounded with a flail until it is reduced to small fragments and powder. The fat of the animal is at the same time melted down. The pounded meat is then put into bags of buffalo hide, and the boiling grease poured on to it. The mass is well stirred and mixed together, and on cooling becomes as solid as linseed cake." The experience of our emigrants agrees with that of these authors, that though at first decidedly unpalatable, tasting remarkably like a mixture of chips and tallow, yet after a time they became quite partial to it. For this staff of life on the prairies the party paid six cents a pound.

All preparations having been completed the travellers set out stragglingly for White Horse Plains, some twenty-five miles from Fort Garry, the appointed rendez-vous. With the usual optimism of amateurs they had fixed upon the high basis of one ox and cart carrying a load of eight hundred pounds for every two men; experience soon showed that six hundred pounds would have been sufficient. On well-travelled level roads the load was not at all excessive; but it was demonstratively too heavy over rough and hilly roads and especially towards the close of a long day's drive.

Though both Mr. R. B. McMicking's diary and that of his brother are silent upon the point, yet from other sources and particularly from Hargrave's Red River it appears clear that at Fort Garry that strange person, made famous by Milton and Cheadle, "Mr. O'B." (Mr. Felix O'Byrne) attached himself, like a bur, to the emigrants, though not to the Queenston section. It seems that no tale of Manitoba or the West, in the early sixties, can be told without a reference to this peculiar person. Our practical emigrants soon discovered that he was an utterly useless and helpless appendage, and at Fort Carlton on the North Saskatchewan they left the reverend, but not revered, gentleman to shift for himself. Hargrave states that he officiated as chaplain of the section to which he had attached himself. However that may be, those who have read Milton and Cheadle's story and, laughing over his impracticable conduct, may have thought that these authors had invented the character, will readily believe that energetic young men such as composed this party would not sit quietly under the spiritual ministrations of so spiritless a creature.

Gradually the numerous sections that constituted the expedition gathered at Long Lake, where the real formation for the overland

journey was to be accomplished. The diary, under date of June 5th, 1862, says: "Rained this morning heavy; are holding a meeting for the purpose of appointing a captain, a committee, and forming general rules for our protection while on our journey. Captain T. R. McMicking (who was in command of those from Queenston) was elected captain over the whole party to Cariboo by unanimous vote of the party." The committee consisted of thirteen members, fairly representative of the constituent bodies. The total enrollment at Long Lake was: Queenston, 24; St. Thomas, 21; Huntingdon, Que., 19; Ottawa, 8; Toronto, 7; Montreal, 7; Ogdensburg, N.Y., 7; Red River, 7; Acton, 6; Whitby, 6; Waterloo, 6; Scarborough, 5; London, 5; Goderich, 5; Chatham, 3; total, 136. This was quite in accordance with American precedent. When the movement towards Oregon was at its zenith, it was the custom of the emigrants to delay their final organization in some cases even for a week or ten days after the journey commenced. Probably this was to enable the people "to find themselves" in their new surroundings.

And now the ninety-seven carts and one hundred and ten animals that carried the emigrants and their Lares and Penates set out from Long Lake, leaving behind them all real civilized life, not to meet it again until two thousand miles with all their dangers happed by land and water should have been slowly and painfully traversed, and then in totally new conditions and amid strange surroundings. We can see the long procession; and the picture is the clearer because of its variance from the familiar scene of emigrants on the way to Oregon. The stately "prairie schooner" is replaced by these little Red River carts, creaking and groaning at every move. Women and children were counted by the dozens—yea, by the hundreds—in the advance to Oregon; but in this company, not one woman nor one child, with the single exception of Mrs. Schubert and her family, who joined it at Fort Garry. Old men were totally missing here, though quite common in the Oregon movement. In truth the Oregon advance was one of real colonization; but this was essentially for a temporary purpose. The road was so indifferent that a guide was necessary to keep the travellers upon the right path; while, in the Oregon immigration, the miscalled Oregon Trail was a broad gash cut upon the bosom of the prairie so deep and clean that it is scarce an exaggeration to say that a blind man could not lose it. Considering that the Hudson's Bay Company and its predecessors had been trading in this region for nearly one hundred years the absence of roads may seem strange; but we have only to remind ourselves that their trade was carried on almost entirely by water communication.

The company on the march and in close order extended over half a mile. Each of the constituent parties kept together, taking the lead in rotation, thus giving to each impartially the opportunity to obtain game and also the use of the road before the soft places had been churned up and rendered difficult to cross. If in the day's march any accident happened the unfortunate cart simply turned aside and fell in at the rear after the repairs had been effected, rejoining its special party at camping time.

At the outset the day's travel consisted of a forenoon and an afternoon drive; the former from five o'clock till noon, the latter from two o'clock till six o'clock, subject, of course, to alteration if suitable camping sites were, or were not, found. Experience soon showed that better results could be obtained by dividing the day's journey of ten hours into three parts. It being the period of long daylight on the greater part of the journey to Edmonton, the camp was alive at 2.30 each morning, and the whole company in motion by the advent of day. After driving for about three hours a halt of two hours was made for breakfast; about eight o'clock the journey was resumed until noon, when a halt of two hours was made for dinner; and about two o'clock the final afternoon drive began, extending until five or six o'clock. In this way, with far less exertion, twenty-five miles a day were easily covered.

Each night the camping place was selected with an eye to the vital questions of wood and water. Preliminary symptoms of the uneasiness amongst the Indians, which culminated during the summer in the uprising in Minnesota, were already apparent. This restive spirit had for some years been growing more pronounced. Hind records that, in 1859, between the Assiniboine and the Saskatchewan he found the Indians determined to establish a toll of tobacco and tea for passing through their lands . Warned by the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, our emigrants were constantly on the alert against Indian depredations. For protection at night the carts were drawn up in the form of a triangle, within which the horses and cattle were secured. The tents were set up outside the triangle, and a close watch kept by sentries—two on each side—during the hours of darkness. This vigilance, doubtless, contributed largely to their freedom from thefts and other annoyances.

The first two hundred miles, from Fort Garry to Fort Ellice at the confluence of the Assiniboine and the Qu'appelle, was along a road well-marked and way-worn. Crossing the Assiniboine at the Prairie Portage, as they called Portage la Prairie, the emigrants followed the chord of the arc almost due west. Just after leaving

that portage the diary records: "Crossed a number of sloughs and some fine creeks . . . were bare-legged a good part of the way." Soon, however, they lost this thoughtful care and waded the creeks and water holes without hesitation or preparation. The diary notes the abundance of game, especially of ducks, on the small lakes and the splendid fish in the swift waters of the Little Saskatchewan.

On June 14th they reached the Assiniboine again and from the top of "a bad stony hill" looked down upon its beautiful valley and that of the Qu'appelle. To reach Fort Ellice the Assiniboine must be crossed. As the only means was a small scow that "carried one ox and cart at a time" it can readily be believed that the transfer occupied from 11 a.m. till 5 p.m. This post, once of considerable importance, stood, a lone habitation, crowning the summit of a small hill, at whose feet flowed a little stream called Beaver Creek. Its trade had gradually disappeared; the only justification for its continued existence was that, being situate on the borders of the great buffalo plains, it was in a position to supply pemmican and dried meat for the use of the brigades and the northern posts. Mr. McKay, the postmaster, is described as "an obliging gentleman who kept a prudent eye to business and a sharp look out after the bawbies."

The following day being Sunday the emigrants, according to their custom, rested. They attended divine service by the Rev. James Settee, the Indian missionary, who took as his text: Song of Solomon, chap. v., 9–10. This gentleman was a native, of Swamp Cree blood. He had arrived in the vicinity in 1859. Upon hearing of his arrival the Indians sent to ascertain whether the "great praying father" had sent plenty of rum; if so they would all become followers of the white man's "good manitou." When the reply came that not only had no rum been sent, but that they were expected to cease bartering buffalo meat for rum, the natives, much incensed, sent further word that "if the great praying father did not intend to send any rum the sooner he took his praying man from Qu'appelle Lakes the better."

Monday morning was spent in repairing the carts and harness in preparation for the long journey to Fort Carlton, on the North Saskatchewan. At the very outset, in descending the hill to the Qu'appelle River, an accident happened. The diary gives the vaguest outline: "Had a bad hill to go down; was very slippery; had been raining all day. An ox ran away belonging to Mr. Morrow, of Montreal. Morrow fell and the cart wheel passed over his head, doing him considerable injury." Dr. Stevenson, who was of the party, attended the injured man, and two days later Morrow and his com-

panions overtook the main body. That very morning the guide, who had been showing premonitory symptoms of dissatisfaction, "borrowed a double barrelled shotgun and ammunition with the intention of going hunting and has not been seen since. We are under the impression that he has deserted us." For a considerable time the company refused to believe in this treachery; but on June 20th, the diary continues, "The guide has not yet been seen." Nor was he ever afterwards seen by them.

From the beginning of their journey Sunday had been carefully observed as a day of rest. Usually a religious service was held, Mr. Fortune, Mr. Robinson, or some other person conducting the meeting. Nothing but stern necessity ever induced the emigrants to break that rule. The entry of June 22nd, says: "Were driven for the first time to the necessity of washing on Sunday."

Eight days after leaving Fort Ellice, during which interval they had lost their way owing to the desertion of the guide and had travelled over very bad roads filled with deep ruts, through a hilly, marshy country abounding in small alkaline lakes, they arrived at the abandoned fort in the Touchwood Hills, a distance of three hundred and eighty-seven miles from Fort Garry. The pools and lakes afforded food and shelter to myriads of geese and ducks, teal, cranes, and bitterns. Our travellers found in them a delightful change from the regular diet of pemmican. Up to June 21st only one ox had been killed for food. As they approached the Touchwood Hills their road passed through a beautiful undulating country of great fertility, plentifully besprinkled with lakes, and covered with a profusion of wild flowers.

Six days later, June 30th, they reached the South branch of the Saskatchewan. The matter of fact recitals of the diary are well exemplified by the entry of this event. Modern travellers would fill a page with what occupies less than a paragraph. "Found the South Saskatchewan a muddy river, about two hundred yards in width. Cross in a ferry boat; about six carts and baggage at a load; swim the animals; all got over at 5.15. Went up the bank and on about a mile and camped at 6 p.m. for the night. A man by the name of Kelso of the Acton party while driving cattle into the river fell in, rose and went down the third time, and was picked off the bottom by a man named Strachan; when brought ashore, life for a while was very uncertain."

About noon on the next day, July 1st, having good roads and driving quickly they crossed the eighteen miles that separate the two branches and reached the North Saskatchewan at Fort Carlton.

This post was about five hundred miles from Fort Garry; seven hundred miles yet lay between them and the great barrier range of the Rocky Mountains. Carlton was of the usual type of trading post: a few wooden buildings within a palisaded enclosure. The facilities for crossing were so meagre that it was almost midnight before the whole company were safely upon the northern bank of the river. No time was lost at Carlton. Having purchased some buffalo meat, the first that they had tasted, the travellers were again in motion by seven o'clock on the following morning.

From this point to Fort Pitt the route was along the north side of the North Saskatchewan. The appearance of the country had changed; it was more hilly and broken. The temperature, especially at night, was much cooler. It became quite difficult for their untrained eyes to keep the trail, which was to be *sensed* rather than seen. The Thickwood Hills were passed on July 3rd, and the Lumpy Hills, July 4th. On that day immense fields of wild strawberries were met. The diary's downright entry runs: "Had strawberries and cream for supper"; but imagination readily draws the picture.

The next day they crossed some particularly bad sloughs. One, a veritable Slough of Despond, as it would seem from the diary's scant remarks, took an hour to cross and was so deep that the animals had almost to swim. A great quantity of the supplies were wetted. But as a recompense they came once more upon good roads and a beautiful region abounding in the most luscious wild strawberries. In a lake beside which they camped and which they supposed to be Pike Lake they caught fine pike. Wolves now appeared in large numbers; at a distance of a hundred yards from the camp they sat and howled through the summer night. Very little wood was to be obtained for the camp fires and the *bois du bison* was neither plentiful nor suitable for illumination. Fording sloughs and creeks, now struggling in the rain along rough, miry roads, and again traversing rich prairie, with the wolves on the flank, just out of rifle range by day and out of eyesight by night they reached on July 8th the North Saskatchewan once more, and on the following day arrived at Fort Pitt.

This fort, on the north bank of the river, about midway between Carlton and Edmonton, was a small establishment and was at that time in charge of Mr. Chantelaine. Like Fort Ellice its principal business was in obtaining supplies of pemmican and dried meat; the buffalo were never far from Fort Pitt. Here an Iroquois named Mitchelle was secured to guide them to Edmonton. Two so-called trails to that fort existed, one on each side of the river. Milton and Cheadle, who passed over in the next spring, chose the northern

route; but our emigrants, following the guide's advice, determined to take that on the south side, as being both better and shorter. Having spent the day in making small purchases and in discussing their future movements they once more crossed the North Saskatchewan. The bateau, or row boat as the diary names it, was large enough to carry five or six carts. The animals as usual swam the river.

The next morning the whole camp was in motion at three o'clock. The trail was very rough and scarcely perceptible. "We find the guide very useful," says the diary, "sometimes we could not see any track at all." Antelope were seen, but though given chase none were obtained. A very large wolf, which had boldly ventured into the camp to pilfer, was shot by Mr. Fannin. Up to this time the weather had been generally fine, but now the deluge. From July 11th to July 21st it rained almost constantly. The diary gives a melancholy picture of sodden ground, brimming streams, and soaking clothing. The numerous tributaries feeding the Saskatchewan became so swollen that the regular fording places were quite impassable. During three consecutive days eight bridges from forty to one hundred feet in length were constructed. Any stream less than four feet deep was waded. On one occasion the waters having spread over an adjacent plain the party were obliged to wade waist-deep for more than half a mile. Question arose whether this were really the *Overland Route*, but Mr. Fannin jocularly remarked that it was at least three feet over land wherever he had tried it.

In one of the lulls of the tempest intense fog settled down and they were compelled to encamp at 4 a.m. after only an hour's travel, "the guide not being able to keep the trail." After breakfast "the guide went in search of the tracks, which had been very dim from Fort Pitt; in fact, most of the way, none at all." After five hours' search the trail was found and the journey westward resumed; and drenched by day and chilled by night stolidly they marched along. One Sunday during this trying time Mr. Robinson preached upon Acts xxviii, 15: "He thanked God and took courage," certainly, as the diary has it, "very appropriate for the occasion." The country, generally speaking, was rolling, dotted with groves of birch and aspen and interspersed with occasional bits of prairie which had the appearance of great fertility.

At last about eight o'clock on the evening of July 21st, they, in the words of the diary, "popped out of the bush on the river banks opposite Edmonton, without knowing how close they were to it. It is a splendid looking spot on a level flat. The weather cleared up and

looked more like fine weather. The people at the fort were overjoyed on seeing the arrival on the opposite shore, but in consequence of the high water in the river the boats were all taken afloat down the river and they had nothing to cross with; but two men managed to cross in a box." So utterly fagged and travel-worn were they that they rested for a whole week. This interval was occupied in crossing the North Saskatchewan for the third time, in arranging the route of the remainder of the journey, and in exchanging oxen and Red River carts for horses and pack-saddles. After consultation with many of the Hudson's Bay Company's employees the emigrants fixed upon the route via Jasper House and Tête Jaune Cache as being the most direct to Cariboo. They were fortunate in finding an experienced guide, André Cardinal, who had already made twenty-nine trips to Jasper House and had also been frequently from Jasper House to Tête Jaune Cache.

The diary mentions that they saw "great quantity of coal on the banks of the Saskatchewan." There appeared to the diarist to be several parallel beds ranging from two feet to six feet in thickness interstratified with a kind of red clay. He dwells upon the fertility of the soil and states that Mr. Brazeau, the officer in charge, showed them a field which had for thirty years continuously produced fine crops of wheat without the application of any fertilizer. During their sojourn they delighted the inhabitants, then numbering only about thirty families, with a series of concerts in which all the latest 'hits' from Canada were enjoyed by crowded houses. The Rev. Mr. Woolsey, the Methodist missionary, was a frequent visitor at their camp. On Sunday, July 27th, they attended divine service twice, at the fort and at the camp. The diary carefully preserves the text on each occasion. When they had secured all the available horses at Edmonton the emigrants visited the settlement of St. Albans, ten miles from the fort, where after much difficulty they purchased the remainder.

Finally on July 29th the party, now reduced to about one hundred and twenty-five persons, for some of them remained at Edmonton, set out on the last portion of the voyage. Instead of a straggling line of creaking carts, the expedition now consisted of some one hundred and fifty pack animals each loaded with from 150 to 250 pounds, including 56 pounds of flour for each person. A few cattle were driven along for food. All heavy bulky articles had been abandoned and our travellers under the tuition of the guide had mastered that supreme test of western frontier life, the art of loading a pack-horse and of 'casting the diamond hitch.' Three days travel over a rough road,

through swamps and brush, and across rain-swollen rivers brought them to the Catholic mission on the shores of Lake St. Ann, fifty miles from Edmonton, where the good Father Lacombe reigned supreme. From this point the road, if such it could be called, led through a succession of swamps, hills and streams, and forests so dense that at times it was necessary to keep men ahead to chop out the brush and fallen timber. In the vicinity of the Pembina River, as a delightful change, they found palatable wild cherries and berries of all kinds in great profusion. On the banks of that tributary of the Athabaska they noticed coal outcropping. "It is seen in beds about six feet deep. Saw a volcano," proceeds the diary, "on one of the high hills; supposed to be coal burning below; smoke rushes out of the top. We are told by our guide that it has burned for a number of years."

On August 5th they crossed the Pembina, which at this point was about a hundred yards wide. The crossing was one of the most exciting of the journey. The water reached to the horses' backs. It was impossible to make a raft and it was too deep for fording. A new plan was evolved; the tents were spread out; the goods placed inside; and then the tents were drawn together like bags. Lines were fastened to the bags and two men on horseback towed them across while two others waded the ice-cold, shoulder-deep water endeavouring to support them and keep them from upsetting. Other goods were carried across by men on horseback who upheld or tried to uphold them on their heads or shoulders. It was indeed a busy scene in that wild and lonely spot; on the one bank the goods being unpacked and made up for crossing; on the other many men busy reassembling them into packs and loading the horses; in the centre the river, full of animals and men going and returning loaded and unloaded; here a couple tugging away against the current with their tent boat, while the luckless wights up to their necks in the water held on behind; there a bewildered equestrian making a vain attempt to guide his steed across the stream, while his nervous friend to whom he had given a *deck* passage held him firmly in his arms and put forth many spasmodic efforts which usually only resulted in wetting them both; and yonder another bold navigator astride an ox, sometimes in the water and sometimes out of it, boxing the compass in his frantic attempts to induce his bovine steed to shape his course towards the setting sun.

Then day after day the diarist exhausts his adjectives in a vain endeavour to do justice to the district through which they are travelling. It appeared to be a succession of beaver swamps, in which the whole

train would frequently be mired at once. These swamps were separated by patches of higher ground, indescribably rough and rugged and rocky. In the end he abandons the attempt in disgust, saying on August 8th: "Language is absolutely inadequate to describe it." The next day in the midst of a dense forest of spruce and poplar they came suddenly upon a reminder of our mortality: "A solitary grave sheltered by birch bark, with the inscription on a large tamarac tree facing it, of a wearied traveller, James Mockerty, who died on a voyage to British Columbia in October, 1860."

Soon afterwards they came upon the McLeod River, also a tributary of the Athabaska. This stream they forded with the packs upon the animals. It was not so deep as the Pembina, but the current ran so swift that two of the party were swept off their feet into deep water and were only rescued with great difficulty. For two days they followed the McLeod River, when, emerging from a thick spruce swamp, they obtained their first distinct view of the Rocky Mountains one hundred miles away. "Their dark outline was plainly visible above the level of the horizon, and their lofty snow-clad peaks, standing out in bold relief against the blue sky beyond and glistening in the sunlight, gave them the appearance of fleecy clouds floating in the distance." The company were enraptured with the scene which gave promise of an end of the succession of hills and streams and swamps, and swamps and streams and hills, that had been their portion for so many days. Milton and Cheadle bear eloquent testimony on this subject. They say: "A day's journey on the road to Jasper House generally consists of floundering through logs, varied by jumps and plunges over the timber which lies strewn, piled, and interlaced across the path and on every side. The horses stick fast in the mire, tumble crashing amongst the logs, or driven to desperation, plunge amongst the thickly growing trees at the side, where they are generally quickly brought up by the wedging of their packs in some narrow passage between contiguous trunks."

On August 15th they reached the banks of the Athabaska. There they met a number of half-breed hunters on their way from Jasper House to Edmonton. Having recently killed some mountain sheep they were able to supply the emigrants with fresh mutton, a most unexpected treat. Five days' travel along the south bank of the Athabaska brought them to a narrow gateway at the foot of the Rockies, a scene magnificent and awe-inspiring. Overlooking their camp rose the Roche a Miette perpendicularly for a thousand feet; across the Athabaska rose, still higher, the symmetrical cone of Mount

Lacombe; while, overtopping all, Mount Miette, its craggy peak softened by eternal snows, towered grandly into the clouds.

The trail now led over a high hill and at its greatest elevation passed along a narrow shelf with perpendicular walls of rock above and below, where one false step of man or beast would mean utter destruction. From the top the emigrants could see Jasper House, a post of the Hudson's Bay Company, a perfect picture of loneliness and solitude, so far below them on the opposite side of the river that it seemed a collection of hen-coops. The scarcity of food had begun to tell upon their animals; and hardly a day elapsed without one or more being abandoned.

The crossing place on the Athabaska was reached early on the morning of August 20th. The river was about a hundred yards wide and fifteen or twenty feet deep, and flowing very rapidly. The emigrants at once commenced to build rafts and in three hours all were safely across, the animals swimming as usual. Along the northern bank they continued their march, occasionally pausing to wash its sands for "colours" or to seek their strayed cattle that now wandered further afield for food. The next day they passed the ruins of one of the numerous Rocky Mountain Houses, called Henry's House, situated near the confluence of the Miette. Their route now led up the narrow rocky gorge where flowed the Miette, a swift mountain torrent some thirty yards wide, having a rough and stony bed, with which they soon became well acquainted. In five hours they forded this ice-cold stream seven times. Wet, tired, and altogether miserable, but not downcast, they encamped beside the brawling stream. They crossed the Miette twice more, and, then, bidding a glad farewell to the unkindly river, they came into a region so encumbered with fallen timber that the expedition was compelled to rest, whilst axemen hewed out a roadway through the wooden entanglement. Slowly they made their way westward, and in the middle of the afternoon crossed the divide into British Columbia, though they did not realize the fact until they found streams flowing in the same direction. That night—August 22nd—they encamped on the shores of Cowdung Lake, the source of the Fraser, the golden river of their dreams.

Almost a month had now passed since they had left Edmonton, and food was becoming scarce. The diary, under date August 23rd, states: "Killed an ox this morning before starting; provisions becoming slack; pemmican about done and flour scarce." They had expected to make the trip in two months from Fort Garry, and had considered one hundred and sixty-eight pounds of flour and fifty pounds of pemmican per head to be sufficient. Almost three months

had now been occupied and they were still in the mountains and ignorant of the distance yet to be travelled or the dangers yet to be overcome.

The next day being Sunday they were compelled because of the scarcity of food both for themselves and their animals to break their established rule and continue their journey. They dined that day upon what the diary describes as a perfect Epicurean dish—roasted skunk—prepared by their guide in true Indian style. All voted it most appetizing, and concluded that his skunkship was a much-maligned animal. Along the shores of Moose Lake, which they followed on the 25th, they killed porcupines; and that night their food was roasted porcupine and stewed huckleberries. Pasture there was none; the animals browsed from the trees and were in no condition to face the hardships of the daily drive. Each day some were abandoned; for facing starvation themselves the emigrants put forth every exertion to reach civilization. After wading streams and climbing hills for two days more the starving party found themselves on August 27th at the place of which they had spoken so often, Tête Jaune Cache at the Grand Forks of the Fraser. And none too soon! Their food was exhausted and they were relying upon their rifles. Anything edible they greedily seized upon. It is told that one man was found roasting a lariat which though but a strip of buffalo hide he regarded as suitable for food. There they fortunately met Shushwap Indians from whom they received dried and fresh salmon, and cakes made of huckleberries and saskatoons.

Deep in its rocky bed the Fraser rushed impetuously along; on each side rose rounded mountains, tree-covered to their summits; beyond them to the horizon snow-clad peaks upon whose sides as the day waned the colours changed as in a vast kaleidoscope; and towering above all, the giant peak, Mount Robson, now Mount Cavell, a magnificent white cone, silhouetted against the blue.

The remainder of the route was unknown. Their guide could give no information. The Indians whom they met were ignorant. Below them lay the Fraser sweeping onward to the west. Should they venture upon it? Or should they continue overland to Kamloops? Earnestly these questions were debated. Ultimately the party divided. Some twenty persons, including Mrs. Schubert and her family, chose to try the unknown route by way of the North Thompson to Kamloops; but the majority, of whom the diarist was one, determined to essay the Fraser. Hence we do not deal further with the Kamloops party; a summary of their adventures will be found in Milton and Cheadle's volume.

Five days were occupied in making rafts to navigate the river. These were unwieldy contraptions, about forty feet long and eighteen feet wide, lashed together with such unsuitable materials as were at hand. Great sweeps were fitted to them, not for the purpose of propulsion, but to exercise some little control over their otherwise erratic actions. Loading upon these queer vessels the remaining goods and the provisions obtained from the natives, the diminished party on September 1st set out from Tête Jaune Cache. The Indians, amazed at the boldness of the undertaking, looked on in stolid wonder and shook their heads mournfully as raft after raft departed on its perilous journey. At first the rafts drifted rapidly with the swift current of the river; but after a few hours the speed diminished greatly. Other rafts were ahead and behind that on which our diarist travelled—as quaint a procession of Argonauts as the western world has ever seen. Day by day they drifted placidly, uneventfully, into the unknown. The day's voyage lasted from 4 a.m. till 6 p.m. when the rafts were made fast for the night.

So five days went by in monotonous procession, but on September 6th, soon after daybreak, a sullen roar of rushing waters reached them, the forewarning of the Grand Canyon. Immediately they made for the shore which they, fortunately, succeeded in reaching before the indraught of the canyon became perceptible. The rapids, they found on examination, were in three distinct stretches, separated by little bays or eddies of quiet water. The precipitous banks contracted the river into a narrow channel obstructed by rocks whose jagged points ripped it into great, frothy, curling waves as the pent-up waters rushed through with resistless impetuosity and with a deafening noise as of continuous thunder. It seemed like courting death to risk the descent; but the alternative was death by starvation. The raft was lightened and the goods portaged to a place below the rapids. Ten men remained aboard to make the venture. Once the raft was in the current it swept onward into what appeared to be the very jaws of death. In the centre the rocky reef foaming and boiling; on the side the eddying whirlpool ready to engulf all—Scylla and Charybdis. In breathless suspense their companions watched the unwieldy thing rushing with frightful velocity toward the rock. Above nature's tumult and din rang out suddenly the commands of the pilot. Instantly all bent manfully to the sweeps. The rock was passed, but so close that the raft was half submerged and the stern rowlock torn off. Then it shot into the eddy. The tension was over. The suppressed feelings gave voice in cheers and sobs.

The other voyagers and the goods were soon once more on board and the raft resumed her journey.

Emboldened by this success and pressed by the dire need of provisions they determined to float night and day down the stream. All except two or three look-out men lay down to sleep as the unwieldy craft floated on through the night towards the land of their hopes. The next day at dawn they noticed that the speed had perceptibly increased. Almost instantly they found themselves in a long stretch of rapids, extending about fifteen miles. The channel was full of ragged rocks, contact with any of which would unquestionably have knocked the float into its component parts. Now they realized clearly the dangers of night navigation. All hands were at the sweeps again; and they made their way safely through the perilous spot. Then they floated along until about noon, when despite their utmost care the raft struck upon a sunken rock from which their best endeavours could not release it. Fortunately at this point the current was not swift. Three of the party swam ashore with a line and while those on the raft cut away several of the timbers others pulled upon the line and succeeded in getting the raft into deep water once more. They then encamped for the night; and on the next day, September 8th, reached Fort George, at the junction of the Fraser and the Nechako, without further difficulty.

On their arrival Mr. William Charles, the gentleman in command of the post, was absent; but as his return was expected hourly they awaited his home-coming. Meanwhile other rafts arrived bringing the sad story of the drowning of Mr. Robertson, one of the party. He and two others had set out in a canoe from Tête Jaune Cache, preferring to risk the descent by that mode of travel, rather than to venture on the unwieldy and apparently unmanageable rafts. In the Grand Canyon the canoe was swamped. "Two of them," says the diary, "escaped by holding on to the canoe, and were drifted on an island and picked up by a raft, neither of them being able to swim; while Mr. Robertson, being a splendid swimmer, struck out for the shore and was lost (as the others thought) but a short distance from it. They lost everything they had but a little flour."

After remaining at Fort George for two days in the vain expectation of meeting Mr. Charles, whose return was long overdue, they hired an Indian guide and resumed their voyage. Fifteen miles below Fort George they encountered its canyon, which Fraser has so well described. Here, for a distance of half a mile, the river is cut by huge rocks into several channels. The rugged banks and overhanging cliffs bore a striking resemblance to the Grand Canyon, but

the actual dangers were incomparably less. Whatever the dangers might be for canoes the illshaped rafts, though somewhat difficult to control, were found quite safe; for though the waters rolled over them, they rolled off again, doing comparatively little damage. In the afternoon they met the first gold miners—Chinese washing with rockers on the river bank. As they descended they found miners on almost every bar. According to their own stories these Chinese miners were only making five dollars a day each, but the travellers gave no credence to such statements.

On September 11th, they set out early in the morning on their last day's navigation. The weather being foggy, they accidentally ran upon a rock, which could not be seen in time to be avoided. The collision strained the raft greatly, but as the fastenings seemed secure they continued the descent, and about noon reached Cottonwood Canyon. In that narrow channel with its strong current and heavy swells the raft, according to the diary, behaved well, and when it came to the overfall, though the water rolled over it and flooded it as it took the downward plunge, the diarist declares that nothing was injured "where a canoe would undoubtedly swamp."

That day they reached Quesnel, then known as the Mouth of Quesnel to distinguish it from a village higher up the Quesnel river called the Forks of Quesnel. The diarist gives some rather startling prices as prevailing: meals $1.50, flour $1, salt $1, rice 55 cents, bacon 75 cents to $1, beans, 75 cents, tea $2, per pound. The day was fine and pleasant, and, he adds: "I got my supper off a table for the first time in four months at Whitehall store for $1.50."

On the arrival of the other rafts the future movements of the party were discussed at length. As a result the organization was disbanded. Some continued down the river on the rafts; some remained at Quesnel; while others, including our diarist, resolved, even at this advanced season, to go on to the mines at Williams Creek. The latter left Quesnel on September 13th for the Cariboo gold fields. The travelling was very difficult and the trail of the roughest. At the end of a hard and trying day they had only covered thirteen miles. Resuming their journey twelve miles of even worse trail brought them to Cottonwood at the crossing of the river of the same name. As they progressed they met returning miners, each telling a more discouraging tale than his predecessor. It was a real exodus of disappointed men, all striving to reach the coast without delay. They painted conditions at the mines as black and disheartening, prices high, wages low, and work scarce.

Depressed by these stories and concluding that it was unwise to proceed any further towards the mines this season they retraced their steps to Quesnel. Thence they took canoe to Alexandria and on September 18th began a walk of three hundred miles to Douglas on Harrison Lake. As they journeyed they found members of their party who were at work as farm hands, cooks, etc., at wages of $40 to $60 per month. By September 25th they reached Bridge Creek. The Cariboo road was then under construction, and when the road makers were met our diarist engaged as a cook at $40 per month and board. This was the realization of his dreams of affluence and easily-gotten wealth. Yet even here he felt himself fortunate as day by day the ebbing tide of disappointed gold seekers passed on. The reasons for this condition are not dealt with in the diary; they were in all probability unknown to its writer; but they are well-known to all who have studied the story of Cariboo in 1862.

The diarist continued with the road makers until the snow fell. On November 3rd the road camp having been closed for the season he resumed his journey to the coast. As this part of the Cariboo road has been described times out of number it is sufficient to say that on November 16th he reached New Westminster, then the capital of the colony, and the end of his wanderings, for the time.