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EARLY DAYS AT YORK FACTORY.

BY BECKLES WILLSON.

NOTE.—In the year 1682 the Honourable Company of Merchants-Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay decided to establish a second factory, to be situated on the western side of the Bay, in the vicinity of Fort Nelson. For this purpose John Bridgar was appointed resident Governor and despatched in the *Prince Rupert*, his arrival in those regions taking place some days subsequent to that of two French-Canadian fur-traders, formerly in the service of the Company, named Radisson and Groseilliers. This pair had set their hearts on defeating the purpose of the English in effecting a settlement in the locality; and probably, if they had had to deal with the Company's forces alone, might not have been compelled to resort to quite so much labour and strategy as is related in the narrative. But, in addition to the Company's ship and crew, there arrived on the scene an unauthorized interloper named the *Susan*, hailing from Boston, in New England. To complicate matters, the *Susan* was commanded by Benjamin Gillam, the son of the captain of the Company's ship, the *Prince Rupert*. Neither Bridgar, the Governor, nor Captain Gillam knew of the presence of the interloper, who, by the laws of the period and the charter of the Company, could be treated as a pirate, and her commander and crew either shot or carried in chains to England. Radisson does not recognize the monopoly of the English Company, which is less surprising when one considers that it was he and his brother-in-law who pioneered all their early undertakings. He lays claim to all the country and trade for his master, King Louis XIV. Not being a match for the two parties of English together he resolves to capture and disarm them separately. One interesting point deserves to be noted: the energy and intrepidity displayed by the Frenchmen, who seem thoroughly at home in the wilderness, and the timidity and helplessness of the English servants. Indeed, had it not been for the subsequent treachery of the two brothers-in-law, in returning to the Company's service and yielding up their establishment to the English, the Company would probably have found it impossible to maintain themselves in this quarter of the Bay. Fort Bourbon, which was the high-sounding title Groseilliers and Radisson gave to their structure of logs, became, later, York Factory. The following narrative forms a chapter in the History of the Hudson's Bay Company which will shortly be published in two volumes.

MORE than fifteen years had elapsed since Medard Chouart des Groseilliers had first fired Prince Rupert with his project of founding a great fur-traffic in the unknown and unexplored regions of the New World. The prince had lived to see that project succeed even beyond his most sanguine expectations. Now, at his death, the Company owned four ships; and after all the cost of its plant, its ships and its expenses had been paid, it was returning a profit of three hundred per cent. on its capital. The extent to which this profit might have been increased had a

more energetic policy been adopted may be deduced from the circumstance that at the time of Rupert's death the Company did not possess more than a single fort or trading post. It was well known that his Highness favoured greater activity, and one of his last acts had been to sign the commission of John Bridgar as Governor of the new settlement at Fort Nelson. It appeared as if the Adventurers had only waited for the advent of the new regime to pursue a more vigorous and enterprising plan of commerce.

Under date of April 27th, 1683, I

find the following instructions addressed to Henry Sargeant, regarding trade with the interior: "You are to choose out from amongst our servants such as are best qualified with strength of body and the country language to travel and to penetrate into the country, and to draw down the Indians by fair and gentle means to trade with us."

But the Company was to learn that the parsimony which then characterized its policy was not calculated to foster the success of its aims. The majority of the men it sent out from England could not be classified under the head of adventurous spirits, ready to dare all for mere excitement and the prospect of gain. They were for the most part young men gifted with no more aptitude for the work in the wilderness than a disinclination to pursue their callings at home. No small number were dissatisfied apprentices; one William Evans had been a drawer at the Rainbow Inn; Mr. Portman himself had sent his scullion.

Even at that early day the staffs employed on the plantations were recruited from amongst the very class least competent to exploit those regions. The majority of the applicants for employment in the Company's service in the seventeenth century were not men of character and vigour, or even of robust physique, but rather hare-brained artisans of the mild, daredevil type, whose parents and friends foresaw, if London or Bristol formed the sphere of their talents, a legal and violent rather than a natural termination of their respective careers.

Sargeant's response to the foregoing injunction certainly served to enlighten his superiors. "I shall not be neglectful," he wrote, "as soon as I can find any man capable and willing to send up into the country with the Indians, to endeavour to penetrate into what the country will and may produce, and to effect their utmost in bringing down the Indians to our factory; but your Honours should give good encouragement to those who undertake such extraordinary service; or else I fear that there will be but few

that will embrace such employment."

The rebuke was just; but it seems to have given offence to some of the more pompous members of the Company; and Sargeant was desired not to cast any further reflection on his employers in his communications to them. Nevertheless, the Company was soon to learn the value of a less niggardly policy.

At the new settlement on Nelson River events were happening, which were to decide, temporarily at least, the sovereignty of that part of the Bay.

For ten days the two ex-employees, Radisson and Groseilliers gave no further evidence to the English of their presence. But on the tenth day their curiosity and uneasiness regarding the conduct of the English Governor, Bridgar, and the other servants of the Company, had reached such a pitch that it was decided without further consideration that Radisson should start off at once to reconnoitre their behaviour. The actual distance between Fort Bourbon, on the Hays River, and the Company's factory on Nelson River was not above fifty miles; but owing to the dangerous character of the river, and the necessity for delay before an attempt could be made to cross it, Radisson and his party consumed fourteen days on the journey.

On their arrival on the 3rd of February one of the first objects to attract their attention was the *Prince Rupert*, stuck fast in the ice and mud about a mile from where the factory was being erected. At the same time they met the Governor, who was out on a hunting expedition with the chief mate of the vessel. Satisfying himself that no treachery was intended Radisson accepted Bridgar's invitation to enter the log-house which he had caused to be built for his own occupancy. Radisson introduced one of the Frenchmen who accompanied him as the captain of an imaginary ship, which he averred had arrived from France in his behalf. "Mr. B. believed it and anything else I chose to tell him," remarks Radisson naively, "I aiming al-

ways to prevent him from having any knowledge of the English interloper." While engaged in the pleasing diversion of drinking each other's healths, a number of musket shots were fired. The crew of the vessel not taking any notice of this, the bushranger concluded that those on board were not on their guard and might readily be surprised.

With this condition uppermost in his mind, the Frenchman quitted Bridgar, having first allayed any suspicion which might have naturally arisen as to the intention of the party. The latter went boldly on board the ship, and no hindrance being offered their leader had a colloquy with Captain Gillam. This worthy, who while he received the visit civilly enough, yet found occasion to let Radisson know that he was far from entirely trusting him. When his visitor suggested that he was running a great risk in allowing the *Prince Rupert* to remain grounded, Gillam bluntly requested Radisson to mind his own business, adding that he knew perfectly well what he was doing—a boast which, as the sequel showed, was certainly not well founded. Radisson was determined not to be put out of temper, and so, run risk of spoiling his plans.

Winter, even in all its rigour, seems to have had no terrors for our indomitable bushranger. For the next two months, as we shall relate, he continued to scour backwards and forwards through this country, inspiring his followers and urging them onward to the prosecution of a plan which was obvious to them all. Parting from Gillam the elder, who had not the faintest suspicion that his son was in the locality, Radisson at once started to parley with Gillam, the younger.

When he had gained the island where he had left he was instantly made aware that the New Englanders had been considerably less idle than the Company's servants; having completed a very creditable fort and mounted it with six pieces of cannon. With Benjamin Gillam, our bushranger passed off the same subterfuge with

which he had hoodwinked Zachary. He spoke fluently of his newly arrived ship and her cargo and crew, and to cap his narrative proceeded to introduce her captain, who was none other than the old pilot, Pierre Allemand, who, from the description I have of his appearance, looked every inch the bold, fierce and uncompromising mariner. He had a great deal to tell Benjamin likewise of the Company's post near by, which he said contained forty soldiers.

"Let them be forty devils," exclaimed Gillam, junior, "we have built a good fort and are afraid of nothing."

Whereupon Radisson gently reminded him that according to his agreement he was to have built no fort whatever. In reply to this Benjamin begged his visitor not to take umbrage at such a matter, as he never intended to dispute the rights of the French in the region, and that the fort was merely intended as a defence against the Indians.

As the evening wore on, a manœuvre suggested itself to Radisson. He resolved to bring father and son together. No sooner had he formed this amiable resolve than he revealed to Benjamin Gillam the proximity of the *Prince Rupert* and her commander, and described the means by which an encounter might be effected without eliciting the suspicions of Governor Bridgar or any of the Company's servants. It consisted briefly in young Benjamin's disguising himself as a Frenchman and a bushranger. The scheme met with the young man's hearty approbation and the details were settled as Radisson had designed.

On the following day the party set out through the snow. Arriving at the point on land opposite to which the Company's ship lay, Radisson posted two of his best men in the woods on the path which led to the factory. He instructed them to allow the Governor to pass should he come that way, but that if he returned from the ship unaccompanied or prior to their own departure they were to seize and overpower him on the spot. With such precautions

as these Radisson felt himself safe and went on board the *Prince Rupert* accompanied by Gillam. He introduced his two companions into the captain's room without any notice on the part of Gillam the elder, and the mate and another man he had with him. Leaning across the table, upon which was deposited a bulky bottle of rum, Radisson whispered to the honest captain that he had a secret of the highest importance to communicate if he would but dismiss the others. Gillam readily sent away the mate, but would not dismiss his second attendant until Radisson, again in a whisper, informed him that the black-bearded man in the strange head-gear was his son.

After communicating this intelligence the pair had their own way. The next few moments were devoted to embraces and to an interchange of news, for Captain Gillam and Benjamin had not met for two years. The sire could not refrain from imparting to his son that he was running a great risk; he declared it would be ruinous to him if it got to the Governor's ears that there was any collusion between them. Radisson again professed his friendship, but added that in his opinion neither of the parties had any right to be where they were, he having taken possession for the King of France. "This territory is all His Most Christian Majesty's," he said. "The fort we have built yonder we call Fort Bourbon, and none have any right here but such as own allegiance to Louis XIV." He observed that nothing would cause a rupture of the friendly relations now subsisting between French and English but that trade in peltries, trade which he had too great reason to fear they hoped to initiate with the Indians in the spring.

Thereupon the elder Gillam coolly responded that the ship he commanded, and the spot on which they were then assembled, belonged not to himself, but to the Hudson's Bay Company.

"With regard to the trade, gentlemen," said he, "you have nothing to fear from me. Even though I don't carry a solitary beaver back to the

Thames, I shall not trouble myself, being sure of my wages."

This interview was prolonged. The healths of the Kings of France and England, Prince Rupert and M. Colbert (quite in ignorance of the deaths of the two last named) were drunk with zeal and enthusiasm. In the midst of all this, that which Radisson had anticipated, occurred. Governor Bridgar, notified of Radisson's return, came to the ship in hot haste. On his joining the group he remarked meaningly that the fort the French had constructed must be nearer than he had been given to think, since its commandant could effect so speedy a return. He evinced himself very uneasy in mind concerning the Frenchman's intentions. Before their departure, young Gillam came very near being betrayed. He was partially recognized by one of the traders who accompanied the Governor. But the matter passed off without serious consequences.

None too soon did the party return to young Gillam's fort on the island, for a tremendous blizzard ensued, sweeping the whole country, and forcing Radisson to remain for some days within doors. As soon as the storm had subsided, however, Radisson started off, declining Gillam's offer of his second mate to accompany him back to the French settlement.

"I managed to dissuade him," he writes, "having my reasons for wishing to conceal the road we should take. On leaving we went up from the fort to the upper part of the river, but in the evening we retraced our steps and next morning found ourselves in sight of the sea into which it was necessary to enter in order to pass the point and reach the river in which was our habitation. But everything was so covered with ice that there was no apparent way of passing further. We found ourselves, indeed, so entangled in the ice that we could neither retreat nor advance towards the shore to make a landing. It was necessary, however, that we should pass through the ice or perish. We remained in this condition for four hours without being able to advance or

retire and in great danger of our lives. Our clothes were frozen on us and we could only move with difficulty, but at last we made so strong an attempt that we arrived at the shore, our canoe being all broken up. Each of us took our baggage and arms and marched in the direction of our habitation, without finding anything to eat for three days except crows and birds of prey, which are the last to leave these countries."

Fort Bourbon was reached at length. After reporting to his brother-in-law all that had passed, Groseilliers was not long in counselling what was best to be done. In his opinion the first thing necessary was to secure possession of young Gillam's ship. Time pressed and the spring would soon be upon them bringing with it the Indians. He argued that delay might prove fatal, inasmuch as Bridgar might at any moment learn of the presence of the New England interlopers; and in that event he would probably make an effort to capture their fort and add their forces to his own. If this were done, the success of the French in overpowering the English traders would be slight and their voyage would have been undertaken for nothing.

It was therefore agreed that Groseilliers should remain in charge of the fort, while his kinsman should immediately return to Nelson River. In a few days they parted once more, Radisson setting out with a fresh party and thoroughly resolved upon action. The first discovery he made, on arriving at the scene of his proposed operations, was that the Company's ship, the *Prince Rupert*, was frozen fast in the ice, and must inevitably perish when the spring floods came. He also speedily ascertained that the Governor, by no means relishing his presence in the vicinity, was already planning measures to thwart, if not to capture, his rivals, for he had sent out two sailors charged with the task of discovering the exact whereabouts of the French and the extent of their strength and equipment.

These two spies Radisson promptly captured—no difficult task indeed, for they had lost their way and were half-

frozen and almost famished. The anticipated fate of the *Prince Rupert* was not long delayed. The tidings shortly reached Radisson that she was a total wreck, and with it came also the news of the loss of her captain, the mate and four sailors. A subsequent report, however, declared that Gillman had escaped with his life.

Receiving this intelligence, Radisson presented himself before the Governor to see how he was affected by such a calamity.

He found Bridgar drinking heavily, but resolved to keep up appearances and to withhold from the French any knowledge of what had happened. He affected to believe the ship safe, merely observing that she had shifted her position a few leagues down the river. Radisson asserts that at this time the Company's factory was short of provisions. It is impossible that this could have been the case. The assertion was probably made to cover his own depredations on the stores of the Company.

Parting from the Governor, Radisson presented himself before Gillam the younger, to whom he did not as yet choose to say anything concerning his father and the loss of his ship. Under various pretences he induced Gillam to pay him a visit at Fort Bourbon. The latter does not seem at this time to have been aware of the intention of the French towards him. But he was soon to be undeceived.

"I remained quiet for a month," says Radisson, in the course of his extraordinary narrative, "treating young Gillam, my new guest, well and with all sorts of civilities, which he abused on several occasions. For having apparently perceived that we had not the strength I told him, he took the liberty of speaking of me in threatening terms behind my back, treating me as a pirate and saying that, in spite of me, he would trade in spring with the Indians. He had even the hardihood to strike one of my men which I pretended not to notice; but, having the insolence later when we were discussing the privileges of New England

to speak against the respect due the best of kings, I treated him as a worthless dog for speaking in that way and told him that, having had the honour to eat bread in his service, I would pray to God all my life for His Majesty. He left me, threatening that he would return to his fort and that when he was there I would not dare to speak to him as I had done. I could not expect to have a better opportunity to begin what I had resolved to do. I told this young brute then that I had brought him from his fort, that I would take him back myself when I pleased, not when he wished. He answered impertinently several times, which obliged me to threaten that I would put him in a place of safety if he was not wiser. He asked me then if he was a prisoner. I said I would consider it and that I would secure my trade since he had threatened to interrupt it. I then withdrew to give him time to be informed by the Englishmen how his father's loss was lost with the Company's ship and the bad situation of Mr. Bridgar. I left in their company a Frenchman who understood English unknown to them. When I had left young Gillam urged the Englishman to fly and to go to his master and assure him that he would give him six barrels of powder and other supplies if he would undertake to deliver him out of my hands. The Englishman made no answer, but he did not inform me of the proposition that had been made him (I had learned that from the Frenchman who had learned everything and thought it was time to act for my security.)"

In the evening Radisson said nothing of what he knew of the plot. He asked those in his train if the muskets were in their places which he had put around to act as guarantee against surprise. At the word *musket* young Gillam, who did not know what was meant, grew alarmed and, according to Radisson, wished to fly, believing that it was intended to kill him. But his flight was arrested by his captor who took occasion to free him from

his apprehension. The next morning, however, the bushranger's plans were openly divulged. He told Gillam that he was about to take his fort and ship.

"He answered haughtily that even if I had a hundred men I could not succeed and that his people would have killed more than forty before they could reach the palisades. This boldness did not astonish me, being very sure that I would succeed in my design."

Having secured Gillam the younger, it was now necessary to secure the fort of which he was master. The intrepid Frenchman started for Hayes Island with nine men, and, gaining an entrance by strategy, he cast off the mask of friendship and boldly demanded the keys of the fort and the whole stock of arms and powder. He added that in the event of their refusal to yield he would raze the fort to the ground. No resistance seems to have been attempted, and Radisson took formal possession of the place in the name of the King of France. This ceremony being concluded, he ordered Jenkins, the mate, to conduct him to the ship, and here formal possession was taken in the same fashion, without any forcible objection on the part of the crew. Some explanation of this extraordinary complaisance, if Radisson's story of the number of men he took with him be true, may be found in the commander's unpopularity, he having recently killed his supercargo in a quarrel.

Nevertheless Benjamin Gillam was not to be altogether without friends.

A certain Scotchman, perchance the first of his race in those regions, which were afterwards to be forever associated with Scottish zeal and labours, wishing to show his fidelity to his chief, escaped and eluding the efforts of Radisson's fleetest bushrangers to catch him, arrived at Fort Nelson and told his tale. The Governor's astonishment may be imagined. He had hitherto no inkling of the presence of the New England interlopers, and although his captain and fellow-servant was not equally ignorant Gillam had

kept his counsel well. The Governor decided at once to head a party of relief, in which he was seconded by Gillam père, who was at the moment only just recovering from an illness caused by exposure during the shipwreck. The *Susan* was their first point of attack. Under the cover of night they made a determined effort to recapture her for the Company—an attempt which might have succeeded had not Radisson, suspecting the move, despatched his entire available force at the same time and completely overpowered the Governor's men. He thought at first sight that Bridgar himself was among his prisoners, but the Governor was not to be caught in that fashion; he had not himself boarded the ship. The Scotchman who accompanied him, however, was not so fortunate; he fell into Radisson's hands and suffered for his zeal. He was tied to a post and informed that his execution would take place without ceremony on the morrow. The sentence was never carried out. Radisson, after exposing his prisoner to the cold all night in an uncomfortable position, seems to have thought better of his threat, and after numerous vicissitudes the Scot at length regained his liberty.

Reinforcements for the French now arrived from Groseilliers. Believing himself now strong enough to beard the lion in his lair, Radisson de-

cidied to lose no more time in rounding off his schemes. First, however, he saw fit to address a letter to the Governor asking him if he "approved the action of the Company's people whom he held prisoners, who had broken two doors and the storeroom of his ship, in order to carry off the powder."

Bridgar's reply was that he owed no explanation to a renegade employé of the Company. Radisson had not been sincere in his professions, and he had dealt basely and deceitfully with him in preserving silence on the subject of the interlopers. "As I had proper instructions," concluded Bridgar, in a more conciliatory strain, "on setting sail from London to seize all ships coming to this quarter, I would willingly have joined hands with you in capturing this vessel. If you wish me to regard you as sincere you will not keep this prize for your own use."

The other's response was rapid and masterly. He marched upon Fort Nelson with twelve men, and by the following nightfall was master of the English establishment. This feat nearly drove the unhappy Governor to despair, and he sought solace by applying himself to the rum cask with even greater assiduity. In this frame of mind John Bridgar, the first Governor of Port Nelson was carried off a prisoner to Fort Bourbon.

To be Continued. (next page)

ALONG THE TRAIL.

FOREVER in the veiled to-morrow lies
 The land of Hope, secure from mortal eyes;
 While in the new-made grave of yesterday
 Some dear delusion reverently we lay.

Bradford K. Daniels.