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New England was
Aug. '99

A Hudson Bay Trading Post.



By Russell W. Porter

With illustrations from photographs by the author.

UP over the great divide, down the western slopes of the Rockies and Selkirks, at a point ten hours by rail from the coast, I alighted at Ashcroft, British Columbia. Sand butts walled in the horizon, sage bush and cactus tinged the landscape a delicate dusty green. The heat rising up from the parched ground was suffocating.

A glance at the town disclosed at once its importance at this particular time. Outfitting establishments bustling with activity, droves of half wild cayuses brought into corrals for inspection, pack trains making up and departing daily and a long row of white tents below the town, all pointed to one theme, the Klondike excitement. It was one of the starting points to the great North and its reported wealth of untold gold. But I was not one of the great multitude preparing for their three thousand miles' journey. Nor have the life and incidents which I encountered on my journey of over four hundred miles from this town to do with the Hudson Bay Company. Let me content myself with saying, as concerns that journey, that a fellow fresh from the East undertakes too much when he attempts to cover this distance with the above mentioned cayuses as his means of trans-

portation, in the expectation of anything approaching comfort. If the devil visits this planet of ours, he surely enters with all his powers the bodies of these beasts.

When I saw Fort St. James for the first time, across the placid waters of Stuart's Lake, the general impression was of its striking resemblance to the Danish trading towns of western Greenland; and as I saw more of the settlement and its daily life, its officers and their routine work, the more did the likeness to those far northern towns hold true.

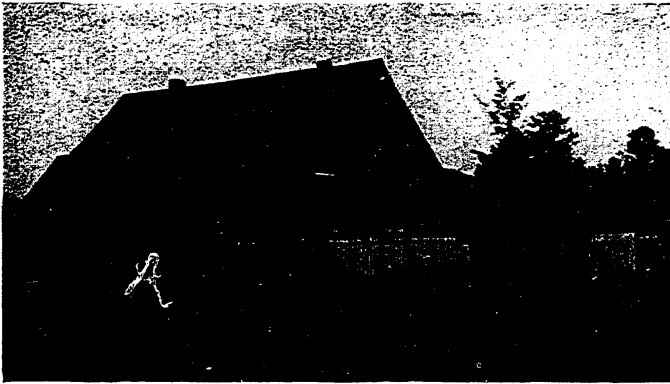
Surrounded by a high massive fence, the log walls of the Company's buildings are seen clustered together. Somewhat isolated from this group are the homes of the natives, the Carrier Indians, a long row of good substantial houses. With some pretence to follow a street line, or rather the gentle curve of the beach, each house faces the lake, within a hundred feet of the water. This area between the houses and the shore resembles in high degree a crowded back alley in a city. Rubbish is scattered every-



FORT ST. JAMES.

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THE OFFICERS' HOME AT FORT ST. JAMES.

where, made up mostly of dead salmon and discarded dugouts. Among these melancholy phenomena, small Indian warriors play and crooning mothers rock babies on their backs.

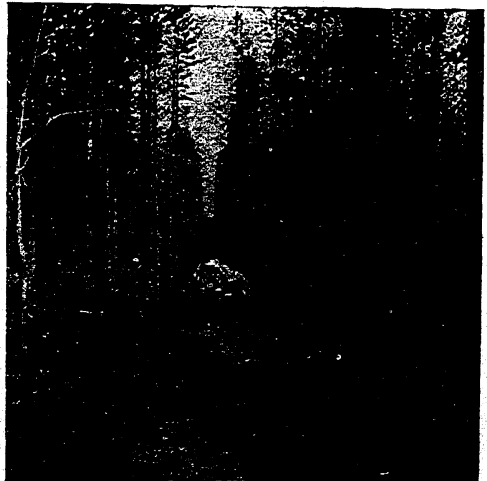
We will not, however, stop here with the natives, but take a look at the fort itself, that which makes the life of the place and which brought it into being. Once inside the enclosure, one feels the privacy of the place, especially so in summer, when there is no trapping and hence little trading. The place looks almost deserted. The store occupies the centre; around the yard and joined to the high fence are the officers' houses and warehouses, massive buildings of logs, squared, mortised and calked with mud. A warm gray covers all except the yellow, sunburnt grass. Turning around and looking northwest, a superb view out over Stuart's Lake terminates many miles away with a line of blue mountains dotted near their summits with snow. Back of the fort the bush encroaches even to the fence itself.

I have found that few people realize the significance or extent of the Hudson Bay Company. Incorporated in 1690, it has had a wonderful career as a trading institution. A huge monopoly at one time, paying its stockholders

big dividends, it has now taken a place among business enterprises as a gigantic country store which takes its pay in skins instead of dollars and cents. When one knows that it covers territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboards, from the Arctic to our boundary line, that its steamers are

plying up the great rivers and its ships crossing the ocean, that it supplies all the wants of practically all the Indians of the Dominion, one's respect for such a power rises.

The life here as concerns the officers in charge and their families, if there happen to be families, is not, as might be imagined, a lonesome one. I was surprised one day after dinner to be ushered into a billiard room, where stood a table of regular size. I found it had been brought in sections in a scow all the way from civilization. To be sure the room was small, but that difficulty was overcome by using cues of diminutive size

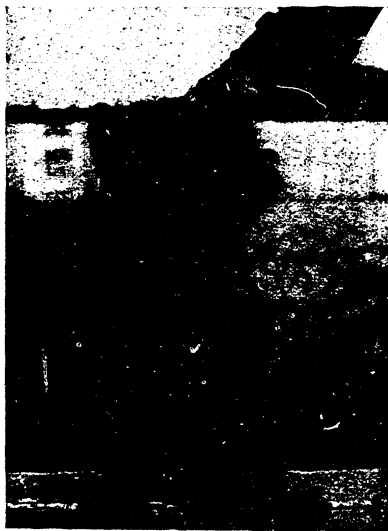


THE LONG TELEGRAPH TRAIL.

or by opening doors or windows, should the player get one of these openings in line with his shot. The furniture on the whole is of home make, crude, but comfortable. A hammock swings from the posts of the piazza.

On retiring the first night I saw two moving coals of fire glaring at

forts when the year's supplies arrive or are shipped en route to other posts farther north. Everything has to be brought from the coast, first by steamer up the Skeena, then by pack train to Babine Lake, thence by schooner to a ten-mile portage, at the farther end of which another schooner brings the cargo across Stuart's Lake to the fort. But part of these supplies go on over the trail to Fort McLeod, and are there put into scows, which go down the Parsnip River and up the Findlay to Fort Graham. No wonder the greater part of a season is required to get food to some of these parts. The half-breed packers know well their business of handling these Hudson Bay pack trains. This is the way they do it. Some ten thousand pounds of supplies are brought out



YOUNG WOLF, FORT ST. JAMES.

me through the window. I got up and locked that window as well as the others. The next morning I saw a timber wolf running about the yard, cutting antics with a big Indian pack dog. Just before rising from the breakfast table, I felt something pressed against my arm, and turning I looked down into the begging eyes of a young doe. A long array of cats, dogs and retired pack horses completed the list of these pets, which lived together in perfect harmony as one large family. The wolf, although tame enough, still clung to his natural instincts, and during the walks we took at dark preferred to slink along behind us, disappearing from time to time into the bush and coming out to the trail again at unlooked for places.

A busy scene is enacted at these



A YOUNG DEER.

of the warehouse and arranged along the planks in piles of two hundred and fifty pounds each. Forty horses, not cayuses, are driven into the enclosure, blinders are fastened over the horses' eyes, and they are saddled. The saddle, composed of two leather pads, is thrown over the horse's back. A strap is passed under his body to two men, who brace themselves



TIGHTENING THE "DIAMOND HITCH."

against the animal's side and pull the thing taut. The horse draws a deep breath and braces his fore feet. The strap gradually tightens until it seems that something has got to break, either the saddle or the horse. This operation finished, the packs are put on and are securely fastened to the saddle. By means of a cinch rope passed several times around the packs under the horse and drawn tight, the famous "diamond hitch" is formed, which makes it almost impossible for a horse to buck off his load.* Then the whole train files slowly out on to the long trail, and disappears into the bush, the bell horse leading, the half-breeds shouting.

At the time I was at Stuart's Lake the Indians were busily engaged in catching and drying salmon for the year's supply. Man, woman and child, all enter into this work with a will; for salmon is their bread and butter. This fish never takes a bait; hence the natives use ingenious devices to lure them into wicker traps sunk to the bottoms of the rivers. The bulk of the catch, however, is

* It is all important that any one travelling with a pack train in this country should be well acquainted with the mysteries of this peculiar hitch. At one point on my way north, I saw the following inscription cut into a tree by the trail, only a few miles from Ashcroft: "Stalled. Haven't found the diamond hitch."

obtained from nets in the lake. The nets and traps are tended by the natives in their dugouts. The fish are brought to the land, split and cleaned, and hung up to dry. A fiery spectacle this makes, blotches of crimson along the shore, up out of reach of the half starved dogs. For the salmon is also the dog's food. When working, he gets one fish a day; when idle, he is lucky if he gets one a week. The last stage of this industry is the storing away of the catch in peculiar houses of small logs

set up on posts where the wind freely circulates. In these the fish are stored, several thousand fish to each family. When all else fails the salmon lasts.

One day in company with my host I went trout fishing down the river; for with all that is said against northern British Columbia, it is certainly a paradise for fishermen. The boat



CHINOOK INDIAN, BLACKWATER.



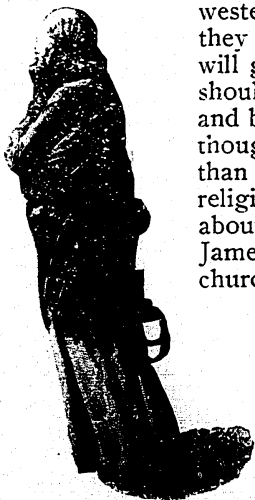
CHINOOK INDIAN.

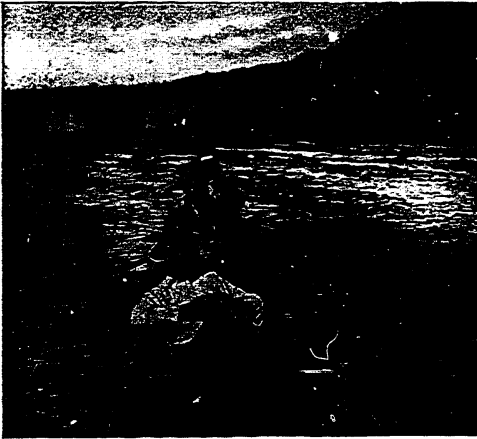
PATRIARCH BROTHER OF THE CHIEF.

floated swiftly down the middle of the stream. Darting past us were schools of salmon, big fellows with red backs, making their way to the lake. The running season was about over. From time to time, we passed boys in all kinds of warped dugouts, with spears poised aloft, patiently waiting for the fish that must surely come. One woman was emptying her husband's trap. One end of the long wicker tube was lifted into the boat and opened. She took out nearly one hundred fish, none of them weighing less than five pounds.

The Indians themselves are too far changed from their native manners and customs to make a study of them covering only a few weeks

of any material value. Fusion of blood from the old French voyageurs, contact with the fort and mission and frequent visits to the coast and other points of civilization have all tended to transform the Carrier Indian. He can tell you first all about the Pope (so he thinks), then a good deal about the Queen, and lastly, a very little about the President of the United States. He cuts his hair short, wears textile clothing, the only remnant of his native dress being the moccasin. He speaks English; but if he is driving a bargain, about all one can get out of him is, "Me no savey." Consumption, that dread disease which, strange to say, is so prevalent among the most northerly tribes, claims its full share of victims. As regards their virtues, for veracity and reliance, Indians are pretty much the same everywhere. For willingness to work, I am told they compare favorably with their brothers in the western states. Like the Eskimos, they adore tobacco and coffee, and will give fresh meat and fish the cold shoulder when they can get bacon and beans. They have their chief, although this personage is hardly more than chief in name. As regards their religious tendencies, the population is about evenly divided at Fort St. James, one half clustering about the church at the mission a mile above the fort, the other living at the post itself. Those who attend church are, I think, faithful in their worship. The two Indians whom I took with me down the rivers, on my way out, lulled me to sleep every night, as we lay

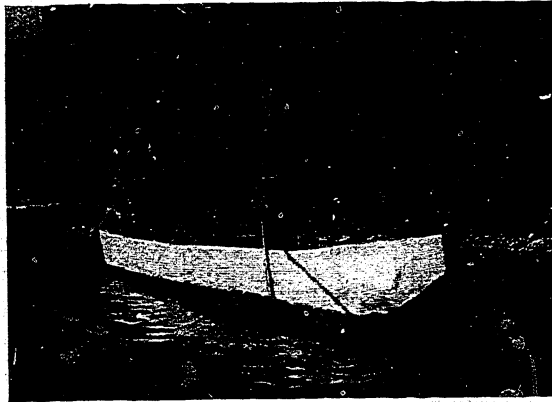




COMING DOWN THE RAPIDS OF STUART'S RIVER.

about the camp fire, with their prayers, translated, of course, into their own tongue. These incantations lasted fully half an hour, more for aught I know, as I was always asleep by that time.

With all the benefits that are supposed to come with civilization, a half civilized nature is always to me a pitiable object. He stands like the wayfarer with his journey only partly finished, thinking of what he has left behind and wondering, or supposed by you to be wondering,



INDIAN BOYS SPEARING SALMON.

what there is at the end. A generation of semi-transformed barbarians these men are, confused with relics of former days and surrounded with new and strange contrivances which mix with the old little better than oil and water. They are unhappy victims of circumstance, knowing not which way to turn.

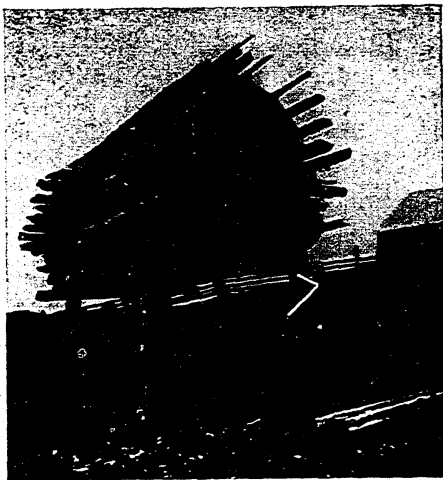
Autumn had set in before I said good-by to the fort, the people and the gorgeous sunsets across the lake. As we shot down the Stuart River and into the great Nechaco, the thickly wooded shores with a wealth of autumn coloring

passed in ever changing beauty. Young cottonwoods wore a brilliant chrome yellow; the underbrush protruded in patches of deep carmine and purple. In strong contrast with these fiery colors stood



APPROACHING STORM, TEINCARD LAKE.

out groups of coniferous trees in Prussian green, except where a forest fire had raged and changed them to a burnt sienna. And on goes the noble Nechaco, pressing against the high beaches until it is fairly turned back into its own course, and we find ourselves going towards the north. It is over all too soon, three hundred miles in four days. Then the steamer, then the stage, and two hundred more miles are covered. At last the coach rattles into dusty Ashcroft; and a faint whistle floating up the hot air from far down the valley tells that the train is coming to carry me three thousand miles and that in five short days I shall be in New England.



CACHE HOUSE, WHERE THE SALMON ARE STORED.

THE PEASANT'S TEMPTATION.

By George E. Tufts.

IN the deep sleep that to the toiler comes,
 Arose the pale and fitful light of dreams.
 By unknown deserts with my love I strayed,—
 When down the wind a group of riders whirled,
 Proudly attired and joyous eke and free;
 And they and we upon the desert plain
 Grew mixed in quaint and spectral minuet,
 Gathered or scattered by a sudden whim;
 And one, the fairest lady of the band,
 Somehow was with me from the rest apart,
 And love's sweet spell upon us fondly wrought.
 Bright in the dream the glance of her mild eye;
 Her soft, white hands were warm as human life;
 Her soft and tender cheek was pressed to mine;—
 When with mischievous glance to where she stood,
 The lady said, "How fares it with your mate?"
 I answered as an idiot, out of sense,
 That she was only little peasant folk,—
 And straightway woke in ecstasy of tears;
 But why they fell I can not now discern;—
 Whether for thought of the vanished lady fair
 And my eternal exile from her sphere,
 Or shame that I was false to my true love,
 Standing alone, forgotten in the waste.