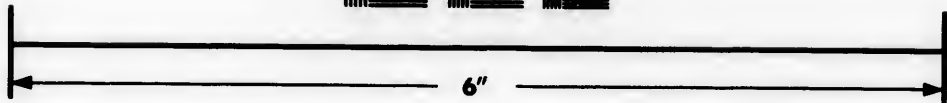
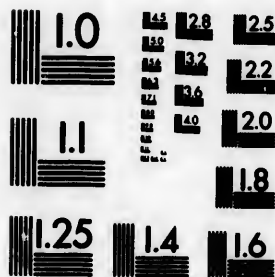


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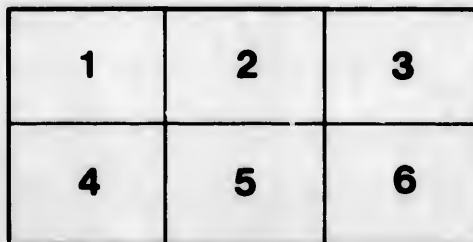
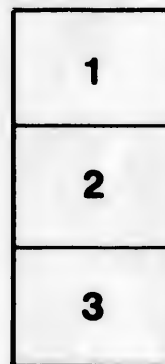
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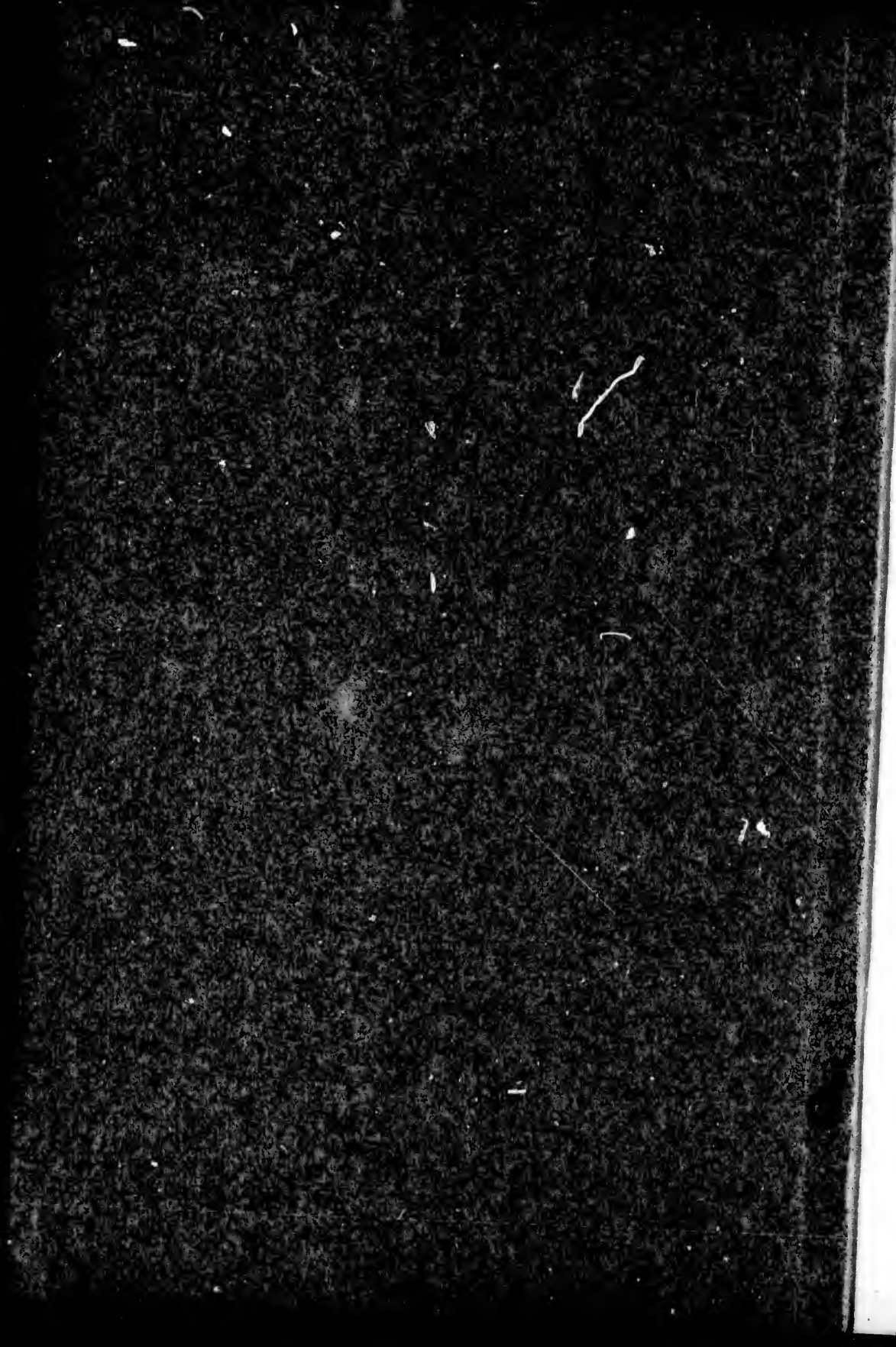
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**With the Canadian  
Northwest Mounted Police.**



BY H. CHRISTIE THOMPSON.

**T**HE mounted police of the Canadian Northwest have, by the trend of circumstances in the farthest extremity of their Alaskan border, become an object of considerable interest across the line.

Eternal vigilance is the price of the control which these silent patrols up to the eternal snows have gained over the natives, and neither the service which individuals will be called upon to perform, nor its extent, can be foretold from hour to hour. The bureau of information moves its atoms, and "Theirs not to make reply; theirs but to do and [if need be] die."

I recall an instance that will serve, perhaps, as a timely example of this.

I was crossing the barrack square at Battleford, late in the fall, when an order was put into my hand which read as follows: "Inspector M— and Sergeant L—, with horses, regimental numbers 1242 and 1673, will leave to-morrow morning at 9 A. M. for Pelican Lake, on special duty. They will be accompanied by Constable T—, with horses, regimental numbers 1485 and 1640, and light patrol wagon number 2. Guide and interpreter S— will go as teamster's off-man. They will take ten days' rations for four men, and ten days' forage for four horses."

The object of our trip was to discover the truthfulness of certain reports concerning the restlessness of the Indians, at Pelican Lake, under a chief called Yellow Sky. They were said to be in an extremely restless and dissatisfied state of mind.

The morning was a busy one for me.

Rising from my cot at the first strains of reveille, I was soon dressed, and at once began making up my roll of bedding. I had been long enough in the country to realize the necessity of sleeping warmly, so three pairs of heavy blankets, a rabbit-skin robe and an oil sheet, with a big, fat, soft feather pillow, a pair of socks, moccasins, towel, soap and toothbrush were placed in the blankets, which were rolled tightly in the oil sheet, and securely strapped.

My next care was for my wagon. I carefully oiled that and saw that oil, wrench, spare bolts, straps, etc., were stowed away in the jockey box, that the tires and wheels were tight and everything in good running order.

Then the bugler sounded "Stables," after which I harnessed my horses and went to the mess-room for breakfast. After that meal, my off-man appeared on the scene, and together we hitched up the team, and carefully overhauled the harness. Then we started around the barracks to collect our load, first visiting the quartermaster's store, where we loaded the large bell tent, with its complement of poles and pins, and obtained cooking kit, pots, pans and kettles, axes, spades, etc., together with the rations and oats. The former consisted of soft bread and hard-tack, pork, potatoes, butter, tea, sugar, salt, matches and candles. The bread and potatoes were packed in gunny-sacks, the remaining rations in the mess-box with our tableware.

We next drove to the sergeant-major's, where we obtained horse-blankets, nose bags, picket-ropes, hobbles, and other



articles needed for prairie traveling, not forgetting robes and fur coats for ourselves. Then to the veterinary store for the horse medicines that we never travel without; and putting our bedding on the top of all, our load was complete. Securely lashing it on with a picket-rope, we drove on to the square at 5 minutes to 9 to await the customary inspection before starting. We were here joined by Mr. M— and the sergeant (mounted, of course), and in a few moments the commanding officer examined the outfit critically, looked the horses over and felt a doubtful fetlock, and finally gave the command: "Transport-right take ground-march!" and we were off. Each of us, as a matter of course, carried his revolver and ammunition; in addition to which I had my Winchester, while the inspector and sergeant each had a shotgun.

A few minutes' drive brought us to the town of Battleford, and we pulled up for a moment at the Hudson Bay Co.'s store to purchase a little *médicine*. We already had colic mixture for our horses and we now laid in a *little colic* mixture for ourselves. It is always well to be prepared for emergencies. A short drive brought us to the bank of the Saskatchewan (great river of the north), which is here crossed by a steam ferry. The boat was on the other side as usual. The crossing took about half an hour, but, finally, we bowled away merrily for our prospective noon camp at Round Hill, eighteen miles away. A fresh team, a good trail, and a perfect day—no wonder we were in the best of spirits.

As we proceeded, the country unrolled itself before us in a constant but varying succession of river, lake, prairie, and woodland. At our feet, between its high wooded banks, flowed the mighty Saskatchewan, stretching away in many varied curves, like a long thread of silver, to the distant northern horizon. Off to the south and west the Eagle Hills reared their blue summits against a bluer sky, while the prairie itself, dotted with its bluffs of poplar and cottonwood, extended before us like a vast park.

The general rate of travel is about six miles per hour. This may not seem very much, but an average of sixty miles a day, up hill and down, across swamps and creeks and rivers, over good trails and bad (or no trail at all), is

very good traveling, indeed. The only method of measuring a distance is by the time occupied in traveling it, and a man soon gets to know the exact speed of his team, and can judge distances most accurately. I have heard two old hands coming in off a trip argue whether they had traveled forty-seven or forty-eight miles, and finally agree on a little over forty-seven, so exact does long practice make them.

About two and a half hours after leaving the ferry we came in sight of Round Hill. As its name implies, it is of a rounded outline, and, rising high above the surrounding country, serves as a valuable landmark. It rises a sheer six hundred feet out of the waters of a pretty little lake of the same name, a regular oval in shape, and about a mile long. Here and there upon the shore are Indian tepees, and very picturesque they look nestling down among the trees, the blue smoke curling lazily upward, and the brightly clad natives passing to and fro. The numerous dogs and ponies, without which no Indian encampment is complete, add life and motion to the scene.

A detachment of our men is stationed here during the summer and autumn as a fire patrol, and we could see their white tents upon the farther shore. Skirting the lake we soon pulled into their camp and turned out for dinner. It would surprise the average Eastern camper-out to witness the speed with which an experienced prairie hand will prepare a meal. A very few minutes generally suffice, if wood and water are convenient, though generally our food is of the simplest description. To-day we are going to fare sumptuously.

Dinner disposed of, after a short rest and smoke, we hitched up and pulled out for Jackfish Creek, twenty-two miles away, where we intended camping for the night. Instead of going by the regular freighters' trail, we took a short cut across country. The boys at the detachment told us we would strike a pretty bad hill to go down. We struck it! Where we first approached it, it is a sheer cut-bank, steep as the side of a house, but a little reconnoitering discovered an easier descent—easier by comparison. But we had to descend diagonally, at great risk of upsetting, and to make things worse, there was a wide, boggy creek at the bottom, crossed by a

narrow rickety bridge—merely a few poles laid in the bed of the creek. The guide got out and took hold of the wagon behind to steady it, while I got a good grip of the reins, a good foothold on the brake, and started the team. They went down in a succession of bounds and plunges, gaining momentum at every jump. The first jump jarred my foot off the brake, and I was too busy keeping on my seat to recover it, so by the time we reached the bottom we were traveling like a steam engine. Bump—bump — bang — bump — plunk. We missed the bridge, for I had turned straight down the hill to avoid upsetting, and the "plunk" landed us in the soft bed of the creek, with only the backs of the horses showing, and the wagon buried to the hubs. With considerable labor and difficulty, we pried the horses out, and proceeded to extricate the wagon. We hitched the horses to the rear axle by a picket-rope, but they could not budge it, so the riders had to give us a pull, and by their aid we "yanked her out." We crossed the bridge safely, and after a little "scratching" surmounted the opposite hill and were again on the level prairie.

We saw a great many chickens that afternoon, and Mr. M— shot several brace without going a dozen yards from the wagon, and as we neared the creek we secured some ducks. We were crossing a narrow neck of land between two little lakes, and the birds flying to and fro above our heads. The sergeant dropped behind, and lying on his back in the long slough grass, got a good many shots and soon rejoined us with several ducks. We reached the creek about five o'clock, just in nice time to get our camp fixed up before dark. An hour or so later we were lying before the fire, blissfully inhaling the fragrant weed, and feeling at peace with all the world. As we lie there, under the deep, dark-blue canopy of the northern night, and musingly watch the sparks flying upward into the darkness, the voices of the wilderness come softly and whisper in our ears. The night wind sighing through the prairie grasses, the whirring wings of a passing bird, the plaintive cry of a plover, or the long-drawn quavering howl of a distant wolf, all have a message to convey.

We silently roll our blankets around us and sink to sleep, thinking how much

better we are going to live to-morrow than we did to-day. But we wake up cold, sleepy, and cross. Strange how cross and disagreeable most people *are* before breakfast.

A cold bath and a hot meal restore our spirits to their usual tone, and we briskly set about preparation for breaking camp. Constant practice makes this but a few minutes' work, and we were soon on the trail again. We are always particularly solicitous to see that our fire is thoroughly extinguished. Too many prairie fires are caused by the gross carelessness of individuals in leaving their camp fires burning when breaking camp. A puff of wind comes, a spark is blown into a tuft of dry grass, and the result is a prairie fire sweeping over miles and miles of country, and perhaps destroying a dozen settlers' homes. One such fire near Battleford burned from early May until the snow flew in October.

This morning the two mounted men were riding ahead, and as they surmounted a little ridge in front, Mr. M— threw up his hands as a signal for me to stop. Riding back he told me there was a flock of geese just to the left of the trail, where there is a little lake. Giving the reins to the guide, and getting out my rifle, I proceeded to reconnoiter. On topping the little rise, I found they were about four hundred yards away, with no shelter to stalk them from, save a small bunch of cattle. Carefully getting a cow in a line with the birds, I commenced crawling forward on my hands and knees, hoping if they noticed me at all they would think I was a calf. I might, perhaps, fool the geese, though they are about as cute as any birds that fly, but I could not fool the cow. As I crept nearer she took one startled look at me, bellowed for her calf, and then came for me with head down and horns well to the front. At the first bellow, off went the geese.

We were still traveling through a fairly well-settled country—that is to say, there was a settler's "shack" every ten miles or so, and we stopped at one for dinner. Early in the afternoon, however, we left the last of these behind and passed beyond the limits of civilization. At last we were in "the great lone land," our faces set toward the north, and nothing between us and the pole save a vast tract of primeval wilderness. For hundreds—yes, thousands of



miles—there are no inhabitants save the red men, and a mere handful of white trappers and traders.

Our trail had been growing more and more indistinct, until at the last house it finally vanished. We struck across country for an Indian trail that leads from the reservations northward to Turtle Lake, where the "nitchies" (Indians) go every summer to fish. As soon as we got off the trail the horses seemed to get discouraged. This is always the case. No matter how dim the trail may be, a horse will jog along contentedly, for he seems to realize that it must lead somewhere, and to that "somewhere" he is willing to go. But when he gets off a trail altogether, he seems to think that he is not going to any place in particular, and might just as well stop where he is, consequently needing continual urging.

About four o'clock in the afternoon we struck the trail, which turned out to be a mere cart track. As the prairie is open it makes pretty fair traveling, and our horses jogged along merrily. We were now gradually approaching the great timber belt, and for the last few miles had been passing here and there stunted pines and spruce. These gradually attained a more stalwart growth, and toward evening we pulled up in a beautiful grove of pines on the shore of a little lake, and encamped for the night.

We were afoot with the first streaks of dawn, for we had a drive of sixty-five miles to make before night, and we wished to give our horses a good rest at noon. An hour later we were in motion, heading for Turtle Lake, thirty-five miles away, where we intended to camp for dinner. Hitherto all the game shot on the trip had fallen to the guns of the inspector and sergeant, but this morning I got two trophies. A couple of hundred yards ahead of us, just to the right of the trail, a badger was sitting at the mouth of his hole. Now, I very much desired that animal's skin to make a pair of winter mitts. As we approached him he, of course, dived into his hole. Giving the reins to the guide, I got my rifle out, and, without stopping the wagon, dropped quietly to the ground about fifty yards from the hole and waited. As I expected, when the wagon had got past him, the badger popped up his head to have another

look. A forty-five caliber bullet through the head procured for me my winter mitts. Tying him underneath the wagon, we had not gone many miles before we saw a skunk crossing the trail ahead of us. A skunk skin is worth a pair of moccasins in trade, so off I got in pursuit. A skunk is never in a hurry, not being built for speed, and will often wait for one most obligingly. This gentleman not only waited for me, but, seeing that I wished to speak to him, most politely came toward me. Letting him get within about thirty yards (for I wanted to be sure of hitting him in the head), I pressed the trigger, and he rolled over with a bullet between the eyes. Picking him up gingerly by the tail, I secured him under the wagon with the badger, and we proceeded on our way. He was with us all day. We had skunk for dinner, and skunk for supper, and would undoubtedly have had him for a bedfellow, if the sergeant (in a thoughtless moment) had not hurled the carcass into the lake.

During the latter part of the morning we were riding through a thick bush, and only left it as, without any previous warning, we suddenly emerged upon the shore of Turtle Lake. The scene is one of the most beautiful it has ever been my good fortune to gaze upon. The lake, of the most intense and vivid blue, stretches away for twenty-five miles. We could just make out a high range of hills upon the farther shore. A brisk, northerly wind blew, cresting the big blue waves with foam and sending the heavy billows tumbling in at our feet. We stood on a beautiful, clear, sandy beach that would make the fortune of a summer hotel, and just behind us was the dark fringe of primeval forest. A fleet of birch canoes was hauled up on the beach, and just within the edge of the timber were scattered the tepees. The white canvas merging into smoke-dried brown, the dark green of the pines and spruces, the snowy whites and yellows of the birches, the waving tassels of the tamarack, the blue lake, the scurrying clouds, the dusky natives—all form a picture that requires the brush of an artist to do it justice.

We obtained a few fine whitefish from the natives in exchange for a little bacon, a welcome addition to our meal. We rested our horses for an hour or two

before starting for Birch Lake (our prospective camp), and this interval we spent in studying the aborigines. A few of the children had never seen a white man before, and they peeped out from behind their mothers' blankets at the shemanginis (soldiers) in awe.

We were still sixty miles—two days' travel—from our destination, and had the hardest part of our journey ahead of us. From the camp to Pelican Lake there is no trail other than a mere track made by the occasional passage of an Indian cart, and only one camping place—forty miles from our present camp. Both days' journey would have to be made in single drives, as there is no water for a noon camp, and in the last twenty miles we should have to cross a small range of hills.

We got an early start the following morning, and after some little difficulty found the trail and were again in motion for the north. We reeled off the forty miles in a little over eight hours, and reached our camping ground in the middle of the afternoon. Hitherto we had enjoyed the best of weather, but all this day it had been getting colder and colder, with a promise of snow from the northward, and one by one we donned our fur coats. As we were pitching our tent the first few white flakes fell, and inside of an hour came down thick and fast, accompanied by a furious gale from the northwest.

We were fortunately in a very well-sheltered situation; had we been on open ground, our tent would not have stood a moment against the gale. Each of our camps seemed more beautiful than the last, and this was no exception. We were in a deep hollow on the shore of a small lake, a perfect circle in shape, and surrounded by a larger but no less perfect circle of pine-clad hills. It was exactly like a large amphitheatre. The lake seemed so utterly lonely nestling down among the hills as though to escape observation it seemed such a long way off to civilization, we could almost imagine ours to be the first footprints to mark the shores. The wildness of the tempest added to its apparent loneliness and isolation.

In contrast with the turmoil of the storm, our camp seemed positively comfortable. Nestling cozily down in a grove of firs, with a bright fire in front, on which the frying pans were frizzling

merrily and the coffee pot sending up its fragrant steam, it seemed to us—cold, tired and hungry—the very *beau ideal* of contentment.

In the morning the sun shone. Under his genial rays the six inches or so of snow that had fallen during the night rapidly disappeared, in spite of the fact that a pretty cold, raw northwind blew. Everything around was cold and wet and sloppy, and our hands and feet soaking wet in spite of boots and gauntlets. As was to be expected, we had trouble with the horses. They were colder and wetter and crosser than we were. It took the two of us all our time to harness the team, but they were finally hitched up and the guide held them by the heads, while I climbed to my seat and gathered up the reins.

"Let 'em go!" He sprang aside and we were off with a plunge and a jump. As the wagon flew past, the guide grabbed the tailboard and scrambled in behind. In a mile or so the horses quieted down pretty well, and consented to walk and wait for the riders. In a little while they joined us, and I noticed that the sergeant was quite wet down one side of his body, and I asked him if he was thrown.

"Yes," he replied. "The brute reared, and came over backward with me, nearly knocking my brains out against a tree."

We were wet enough in all conscience at starting, but a short time afterward could only be compared to drowned rats. The trail now wended through thick woods, and the trees grew so close together that we were brushing them on either hand. Underbrush growing ten or twelve feet high stood in the very center of the trail, and sitting on our high seat we were being continually swept by overhanging branches. In view of the fact that each branch and leaf and twig carried its burden of wet snow, it will be easy to realize our drenched condition. And a cold northwind blowing! Every now and then the front wheels would catch in a sapling, which, being released, sprang back with a swish and caught us a stinging blow across the face. One such blow, from a sharp icy twig, cut my ear open badly, while the guide's face was a mass of welts. The two riders fared better, as they proceeded in single file in the center of the trail.

As we rounded a little bend, we found they had halted on the edge of a very nasty hill, and Mr. M— asked me if I thought I could get down without unloading the wagon. I had not the slightest doubt about getting down, though I had grave doubts about reaching the bottom right-side up. However, as I had no desire to lug sacks of oats, etc., down and up a steep hill, I replied, with the utmost confidence, that I could. Locking the two hind wheels, the sergeant and guide prepared to steady the load, and down we went. All morning I had been blessing the high, narrow springy seat, and now I had additional cause. Half-way down the hill, the front wheel struck one of the bowlders, and I was shot off the seat on to my head like a catapult. Fortunately, I lighted in a low bush, which broke my fall and as I had still firm hold of the reins, we reached the bottom safely.

We had to call on the riders for aid to surmount the opposite hill. Taking two picket ropes, we fastened one end of each securely to the tongue, and they the other ends to their saddles. With this novel four-in-hand we easily surmounted the slope. The trail got worse worse as we ascended the mountain, until the horses could hardly proceed faster than a walk. The deep cart ruts were too narrow for them to travel in, but wide enough to have one or another foot continually slipping in, which is very tiring on poor brutes. Traveling so very slowly seemed to make the distance longer than it really was, but at last we emerged from the wood on to a stretch of comparatively open prairie. The guide pointed to a range of hills some five or six miles ahead, told us that Pelican Lake lay just at their foot. We had been nearly seven hours doing the odd fifteen miles over the mountain, but now rattled along at a good pace and pulled into the Indian village, cold, wet, tired and ravenous.

Our hunger satisfied, our clothes dried, and our bodies warmed, we sallied forth to pay our respects to old Yellow

Sky. The village comprises over fifty lodges, mostly laid out in two straight rows on either side of a wide lane. We strolled down this avenue, and were apparently great objects of curiosity, for every doorway was full of dark faces peering out at the shemanginis. The dogs were also greatly interested, and gathered around in their anxiety to find out who we were, and what we wanted in their camp. Having had some previous experience of Indian dogs, we had thoughtfully provided ourselves with clubs, and the animals kept at a respectful distance. Entering the low doorway of the chief's lodge, we received a very friendly greeting: "Haw! Haw! men kirsecaw" (How do you do? Good day, good day), and a long pow-wow ensued. Mr. M— tells the chief that the oky maw (head man) at Battleford has heard that he (Yellow Sky) is not very friendly to his brothers the whites. This the chief indignantly denied, and declared that the white man never had a better friend than himself. In the end he succeeded in convincing Mr. M— of his friendliness and honesty, and we were soon on the best of terms.

Two pleasant days were spent in prospecting, hunting and fishing with the natives, and on the third day we pulled out for home. Many were the handshakings, many were the men kirsecaws spoken, and many were the invitations given to come and see them again, as with our wagon, laden with presents of fish and game, we reluctantly turned our backs upon our dusky friends. The trip homeward was but a repetition of the first part of our journey. We encountered no bad weather, and met with no incidents other than the everyday events of travel. We saw some moose and jumping deer, but had not time to stop and hunt. On the evening of the eleventh day we entered the barrack gate, and our trip was over.

It may seem a great deal of trouble to have taken about so small a matter, but a stitch in time saves nine in more things than darning socks.



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