

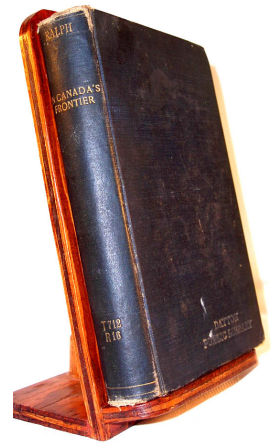
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On Canada's Frontier

Sketches of History, Sport, Adventure, Indians, Missionaries, Fur-Traders and Newer Settlers in Western Canada

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ON CANADA'S FRONTIER

Sketches

OF HISTORY, SPORT, AND ADVENTURE
AND OF THE INDIANS, MISSIONARIES
FUR-TRADERS, AND NEWER SETTLERS
OF WESTERN CANADA,



BY

JULIAN RALPH

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

1892

PREFACE

IF all those into whose hands this book may fall were as well informed upon the Dominion of Canada as are the people of the United States, there would not be needed a word of explanation of the title of this volume. Yet to those who might otherwise infer that what is here related applies equally to all parts of Canada, it is necessary to explain that the work deals solely with scenes and phases of life in the newer, and mainly the western, parts of that country. The great English colony which stirs the pages of more than two centuries of history has for its capitals such proud and notable cities as Montreal, Quebec, Toronto, Halifax, and many others, to distinguish the progressive civilization of the region east of Lake Huron—the older provinces. But the Canada of the geographies of to-day is a land of greater area than the United States; it is, in fact, the “British America” of old. A great trans-Canadian railway has joined the ambitious province of the Pacific slope to the provinces of old Canada with stitches of steel across the Plains. There the same mixed surplusage of Europe that settled our own West is elbowing the fur-trader and the Indian out of the way, and is laying out farms far north, in the smiling Peace River district, where it was only a little while ago supposed that there were but two seasons, winter and late spring. It is with that new part of Canada, between the ancient and well-populated provinces and the sturdy new cities of the Pacific Coast, that this book deals. Some references to the North are added in those chapters that treat of hunting and fishing and fur-trading.

The chapters that compose this book originally formed a series of

papers which recorded journeys and studies made in Canada during the past three years. The first one to be published was that which describes a settler's colony in which a few titled foreigners took the lead; the others were written so recently that they should possess the same interest and value as if they here first met the public eye. What that interest and value amount to is for the reader to judge, the author's position being such that he may only call attention to the fact that he had access to private papers and documents when he prepared the sketches of the Hudson Bay Company, and that, in pursuing information about the great province of British Columbia, he was not able to learn that a serious and extended study of its resources had ever been made. The principal studies and sketches were prepared for and published in HARPER'S MAGAZINE. The spirit in which they were written was solely that of one who loves the open air and his fellow-men of every condition and color, and who has had the good-fortune to witness in newer Canada something of the old and almost departed life of the plainsmen and woodsmen, and of the newer forces of nation-building on our continent.

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CHARTERING A NATION

HOW it came about that we chartered the Blackfoot nation for two days had better not be told in straightforward fashion. There is more that is interesting in going around about the subject, just as in reality we did go around and about the neighborhood of the Indians before we determined to visit them.

In the first place, the most interesting Indian I ever saw—among many kinds and many thousands—was the late Chief Crowfoot, of the Blackfoot people. More like a king than a chief he looked, as he strode upon the plains, in a magnificent robe of white bead-work as rich as ermine, with a gorgeous pattern illuminating its edges, a glorious sun worked into the front of it, and many artistic and chromatic figures sewed in gaudy beads upon its back. He wore an old white chimney-pot hat, bound around with eagle feathers, a splendid pair of *chaperajos*, all worked with beads at the bottoms and fringed along the sides, and bead-worked moccasins, for which any lover of the Indian or collector of his paraphernalia would have exchanged a new Winchester rifle without a second's hesitation. But though Crowfoot was so royally clothed, it was in himself that the kingly quality was most apparent. His face was extraordinarily like what portraits we have of Julius Cæsar,



INDIAN MOTHER AND BOY

clude several horses to each head of a family; and though the majority of their ponies would fetch no more than \$20 apiece out there, even this gives them more wealth per capita than many civilized peoples can boast. They have managed, also, to keep much of the savage paraphernalia of other days in the form of buckskin clothes, elaborate bead-work, eagle head-dresses, good guns, and the outlandish adornments of their chiefs and medicine-men. Hundreds of miles from any except such small and distant towns as Calgary and Medicine Hat, and kept on the reserve as much as possible, there has come to them less damage by whiskey and white men's vices than perhaps most other tribes have suffered. Therefore it was still possible for me to see in some tents the squaws at work painting the clan signs on stretched skins, and making bead-work for moccasins, pouches, "chaps," and the rest. And in one tepee I found a young and rather pretty girl wearing a suit of buckskin,



A FANTASY FROM THE PONY WAR-DANCE

Crowfoot kept the Indians from war, and even from depredations and from murder. When the half-breeds arose under Riel, and every Indian looked to his rifle and his knife, and when the mutterings that preface the war-cry sounded in every lodge, Father Lacombe made Crowfoot pledge his word that the Indians should not rise. The priest represented the Government on these occasions. The Canadian statesmen recognize the value of his services. He is the great authority on Indian matters beyond our border; the ambassador to and spokesman for the Indians.

But Father Lacombe is more than that. He is the deepest student of the Indian languages that Canada possesses. The revised edition of Bishop Barager's *Grammar of the Ochipwe Language* bears these words upon its title-page: "Revised by the Rev. Father Lacombe, Oblate Mary Immaculate, 1878." He is the author of the authoritative *Dictionnaire et Grammaire de la Langue Crise*, the dictionary of the Cree dialect published in 1874. He has compiled just such another monument to the Blackfoot language, and will soon publish it, if he has not done so already. He is in constant correspondence with our Smithsonian Institution; he is famous to all who study the Indian; he is beloved or admired throughout Canada.

His work in these lines is labor of love. He is a student by nature. He began the study of the Algonquin language as a youth in older Canada, and the tongues of many of these tribes from Labrador to Athabasca are but dialects of the language of the

many sorts of clothing we Yankees know very little of (though many of us need them) that at a glance we say the Montrealers are foreigners. Montreal is the gayest city on this continent, and I have often thought that the clothing there is largely responsible for that condition.

A New Yorker disembarking in Montreal in mid-winter finds the place inhospitably cold, and wonders how, as well as why, any one lives there. I well remember standing years ago beside a toboggan-slide, with my teeth chattering and my very marrow slowly congealing, when my attention was called to the fact that a dozen ruddy-cheeked, bright-eyed, laughing girls were grouped in snow that reached their knees. I asked a Canadian lady how that could be possible, and she answered with a list of the principal garments those girls were wearing. They had two pairs of stockings under their shoes, and a pair of stockings over their shoes, with moccasins over them. They had so many woollen skirts that an American girl would not believe me if I gave the number. They wore heavy dresses and buckskin jackets, and blanket suits over all this. They had mittens over their gloves, and fur caps over their knitted hoods. It no longer seemed wonderful that they should not heed the cold; indeed, it occurred to me that their bravery amid the terrors of tobogganing was no bravery at all, since a girl buried deep in the heart of such a mass of woollens could scarcely expect damage if she fell from a steeple. When next I appeared out-of-doors I too was swathed in flannel, like a jewel in a box of plush, and from that time out Montreal seemed,

get our guns ready. We each threw a cartridge from the cylinder into the barrel, making a "click, click" that was abominably loud. Alexandre forged ahead. In five minutes we heard him call aloud: "Moose gone. We los' him." We hastened to his side. He pointed at some tracks in which the prints were closer together than any we had seen.

"See! he trot," Alexandre explained.

In another five minutes we had all but completed a circle, and were on the other side of the tamarack thicket. And there were the prints of the bodies of the great beasts. We could see even the imprint of the hair of their coats. All around were broken twigs and balsam needles. The moose had left the branches ragged, and on every hand the young bark was chewed or rubbed raw. Loading our rifles had lost us a herd of moose.

Back once again at the beaver dam, Alexandre and Pierre studied the moose-tramped snow and talked earnestly. They agreed that a desperate battle had been fought there between two bull moose a week before, and that those bulls were not in the "yard" where we had blundered. They examined the tracks over an acre or more, and then strode off at an obtuse angle from our former trail. Pierre, apparently not quite satisfied, kept dropping behind or disappearing in the bush at one side of us. So magnificent was his skill at his work that I missed him at times, and at other times found him putting his feet down where mine were lifted up without ever hearing a sound of his step or of his contact with the undergrowth. Alexandre presently motioned us

gle. In winter there is as good sport with the namaycush, and it is managed peculiarly. The Indians cut into the ice over deep water, making holes at least eighteen inches in diameter. Across the hole they lay a stick, so that when they pull up a trout the line will run along the stick, and the fish will hit that obstruction instead of the resistant ice. If a fish struck the ice the chances are nine to one that it would tear off the hook. Having baited a hook with pork, and stuck the customary bit of lead upon it, they sound for bottom, and then measure the line so that it will reach to about a foot and a half above soundings—that is to say, off bottom. Then they begin fishing, and their plan is (it is the same all over the Canadian wilderness) to keep jerking the line up with a single, quick, sudden bob at frequent intervals.

The spring is the time to catch the big Nepigon jack-fish, or pike. They haunt the grassy places in little bogs and coves, and are caught by trolling. A jack-fish is what we call a pike, and John Watt, the famous guide in that country, tells of those fish of such size that when a man of ordinary height held the tail of one up to his shoulder, the head of the fish dragged on the ground. He must be responsible for the further assertion that he saw an Indian squaw drag a net, with meshes seven inches square, and catch two jack-fish, each of which weighed more than fifty pounds when cleaned. The story another local historian told of a surveyor who caught a big jack-fish that felt like a sunken log, and could only be dragged until its head came to the surface, when he shot it and it broke away—that narrative I will

don its original function, this merely demonstrates that the proprietors have taken advantage of new conditions while still pursuing their original trade. It is true that the huge corporation is becoming a great retail shop-keeping company. It is also true that by the surrender of its monopolistic privileges it got a consolation prize of money and of twenty millions of dollars' worth of land, so that its chief business may yet become that of developing and selling real estate. But to-day it is still, as it was two centuries ago, the greatest of fur-trading corporations, and fur-trading is to-day a principal source of its profits.

Reminders of their old associations as forts still confront the visitor to the modern city shops of the company. The great shop in Victoria, for instance, which, as a fort, was the hub around which grew the wheel that is now the capital of the province, has its fur trade conducted in a sort of barn-like annex of the bazaar; but there it is, nevertheless, and busy among the great heaps of furs are men who can remember when the Hydahs and the Tlinkets and the other neighboring tribes came down in their war canoes to trade their winter's catch of skins for guns and beads, vermilion, blankets, and the rest. Now this is the mere catch-all for the furs got at posts farther up the coast and in the interior. But upstairs, above the store, where the fashionable ladies are looking over laces and purchasing perfumes, you will see a collection of queer old guns of a pattern familiar to Daniel Boone. They are relics of the fur company's stock of those famous "trade-guns" which disappeared long before they had cleared the plains



A HUDSON BAY MAN (QUARTER-BREED)

misdemeanors." Such was the prejudice against the Hudson Bay Company and the regard for the home corporation that nearly all were acquitted, and suits for very heavy damages were lodged against him.

Selkirk sought to treat with the Indians for his land, which they said belonged to the Chippeways and the Crees. Five chiefs were found whose right to treat was acknowledged by all. On July 18, 1817, they deeded the territory to the King, "for the benefit of Lord Selkirk," giving him a strip two miles wide on either side of the Red River from Lake

The French Canadians and "breeds," who were the *voyageurs* and hunters, made a gay appearance. They used to wear the company's regulation light blue capotes, or coats, in winter, with flannel shirts, either red or blue, and corduroy trousers gartered at the knee with bead-work. They all wore gaudy worsted belts, long, heavy woollen stockings—covered with gayly-fringed leggins—fancy moccasins, and tuques, or feather-decked hats or caps bound with tinsel bands. In mild weather their costume was formed of a blue striped cotton shirt, corduroys, blue cloth leggins bound with orange ribbons, the inevitable sash or worsted belt, and moccasins. Every hunter carried a powder-horn slung from his neck, and in his belt a tomahawk, which often served also as a pipe. As late as 1862, Viscount Milton and W. B. Cheadle describe them in a book, *The Northwest Passage by Land*, in the following graphic language:

"The men appeared in gaudy array, with beaded fire-bag, gay sash, blue or scarlet leggins, girt below the knee with beaded garters, and moccasins elaborately embroidered. The (half-breed) women were in short, bright-colored skirts, showing richly embroidered leggins and white moccasins of cariboo-skin beautifully worked with flowery patterns in beads, silk, and moose hair."

The trading-room at an open post was—and is now—like a cross-roads store, having its shelves laden with every imaginable article that Indians like and hunters need—clothes, blankets, files, scalp-knives, gun screws, flints, twine, fire-steels, awls, beads, needles, scissors, knives, pins, kitchen ware, guns, powder, and shot. An Indian who came in with

country likewise—just this side of the Rocky Mountains, where the plains begin to be forested—that a silly clerk in a post quarrelled with an Indian, and said to him, " Before you come back to this post again, your wife and child will be dead." He spoke hastily, and meant nothing, but squaw and pappoose happened to die that winter, and the Indian walked into the fort the next spring and shot the clerk without a word.

To-day the posts are little village-like collections of buildings, usually showing white against a green background in the prettiest way imaginable; for, as a rule, they cluster on the lower bank of a river, or the lower near shore of a lake. There are not clerks enough in most of them to render a clerks' house necessary, for at the little posts half-breeds are seen to do as good service as Europeans. As a rule, there is now a store or trading-house and a fur-house and the factor's house, the canoe-house and the stable, with a barn where gardening is done, as is often the case when soil and climate permit. Often the fur-house and store are combined, the furs being laid in the upper story over the shop. There is always a flag-staff, of course. This and the flag, with the letters " H. B. C." on its field, led to the old hunters' saying that the initials stood for " Here before Christ," because, no matter how far away from the frontier a man might go, in regions he fancied no white man had been, that flag and those letters stared him in the face. You will often find that the factor, rid of all the ancient timidity that called for " palisades and swivels," lives on the high upper bank above

It would severely strain the slender facts to make a sizable pamphlet of the history of British Columbia. A wandering and imaginative Greek called Juan de Fuca told his people that he had discovered a passage from ocean to ocean between this continent and a great island in the Pacific. Sent there to seize and fortify it, he disappeared—at least from history. This was about 1592. In 1778 Captain Cook roughly surveyed the coast, and in 1792 Captain Vancouver, who as a boy had been with Cook on two voyages, examined the sound between the island and the mainland with great care, hoping to find that it led to the main water system of the interior. He gave to the strait at the entrance the nickname of the Greek, and in the following year received the transfer of authority over the country from the Spanish commissioner Bodega of Quadra, then established there. The two put aside false modesty, and named the great island “the Island of Vancouver and Quadra.” At the time the English sailor was there it chanced that he met that hardy old homespun baronet Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who was the first man to cross the continent, making the astonishing journey in a canoe manned by Iroquois Indians. The mainland became known as New Caledonia. It took its present name from the Columbia River, and that, in turn, got its name from the ship *Columbia*, of Boston, Captain Gray, which entered its mouth in 1792, long after the Spaniards had known the stream and called it the Oregon. The rest is quickly told. The region passed into the hands of the fur-traders. Vancouver Island became a crown colony in 1849, and

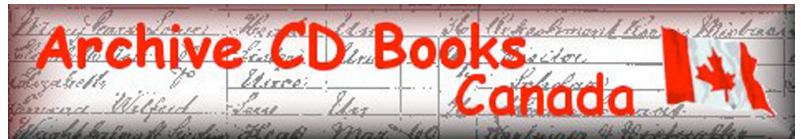
in gold-dust from certain creeks in what is called the Cariboo District, and one can imagine (if one does not remember) what fabulous tales were based upon this fact. The second stampede was of persons from all over the world, but chiefly from England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. After that there were new "finds" almost every year, and the miners worked gradually northward until, about 1874, they had travelled through the province, in at one end and out at the other, and were working the tributaries of the Yukon River in the north, beyond the 60th parallel. Mr. Dawson estimates that the total yield of gold between 1858 and 1888 was \$54,108,804; the average number of miners employed each year was 2775, and the average earnings per man per year were \$622.

In his report, published by order of Parliament, Mr. Dawson says that while gold is so generally distributed over the province that scarcely a stream of any importance fails to show at least "colors" of the metal, the principal discoveries clearly indicate that the most important mining districts are in the systems of mountains and high plateaus lying to the south-west of the Rocky Mountains and parallel in direction with them.

This mountain system next to and south-west of the Rockies is called, for convenience, the Gold Range, but it comprises a complex belt "of several more or less distinct and partly overlapping ranges"—the Purcell, Selkirk, and Columbia ranges in the south, and in the north the Cariboo, Omenica, and Cassiar ranges. "This series or system constitutes

and of the distinctive type which marks the houses of the California towns—are surrounded by gardens. It has a beautiful but inadequate harbor; yet in a few years it will have spread to Esquimault, now less than two miles distant. This is now the seat of a British admiralty station, and has a splendid haven, whose water is of a depth of from six to eight fathoms. At Esquimault are government offices, churches, schools, hotels, stores, a naval “canteen,” and a dry-dock 450 feet long, 26 feet deep, and 65 feet wide at its entrance. The electric street railroad of Victoria was extended to Esquimault in the autumn of 1890. Of the climate of Victoria Lord Lorne said, “It is softer and more constant than that of the south of England.”

Vancouver, the principal city of the main-land, is slightly smaller than Victoria, but did not begin to displace the forest until 1886. After that every house except one was destroyed by fire. To-day it boasts a hotel comparable in most important respects with any in Canada, many noble business buildings of brick or stone, good schools, fine churches, a really great area of streets built up with dwellings, and a notable system of wharves, warehouses, etc. The Canadian Pacific Railway terminates here, and so does the line of steamers for China and Japan. The city is picturesquely and healthfully situated on an arm of Burrard Inlet, has gas, water, electric lights, and shows no sign of halting its hitherto rapid growth. Of New Westminster, Nanaimo, Yale, and the still smaller towns, there is not opportunity here for more than naming.



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