

The North-West Passage by Land

Installment II

By LORD MILTON and DR. CHEADLE

Reviewed by GEORGE SHEPHERD, West Plains, Saskatchewan

THE conclusion of our first installment of the "North-West Passage by Land" showed how the two adventurers, Milton and Cheadle, had at long last made a start from Fort Garry on a journey that was to take them westward to Vancouver.

They had stayed overnight with their party at Portage La Prairie—the western boundary of the Red River Settlement—and the following day they travelled through a fine undulating country, full of lakes and marshes thronged with wild fowl, and studded with pretty bluffs of poplar. The date was the 24th of August; the year 1862.

Each day was like the one before. The riders jogged dreamily along and shot geese and ducks in the lakes or prairie grouse in the copses. Feathered game was so plentiful that they had no need to touch their little stock of pemmican. The following day they met a train of carts returning from Carlton to Red River. The man in charge of the outfit was the bearer of a note from Lord Dunmore who stated that he was lying ill at Fort Ellice and he requested Dr. Cheadle to come to his relief as quickly as possible.

The next morning Milton and Cheadle started out on horseback for Fort Ellice, leaving the men and carts to follow more slowly. They rode hard but were very much put out when, on the evening of the third day, they arrived at Ellice to find that Lord Dunmore had made a recovery and had left for the buffalo plains to the west. The two Englishmen were very kindly entertained by Mr. Mackay, the officer in charge of the Fort, and they passed the time away by visiting the Indians who were camped near the Post. From one of the Crees camped there they purchased a "lodge" in place of their canvas tent figuring that the leather lodge would be far more comfortable during the cold autumn nights, as it admitted of a fire being made in the centre.

Making Pemmican

The white men found the Indian women busy making pemmican which Milton describes as follows. The meat, having been dried in the sun or over a fire, is placed in a dressed buffalo hide and pounded with a stick or flail until it is reduced to small fragments or powder. The fat of the animal is at the same time melted down. The pounded meat is

then put into buffalo hide bags and the boiling grease poured on to it. The whole mass was then stirred together and then allowed to solidify. A finer kind of pemmican was made by using only the marrow fat and adding berries of different kinds.

In writing of pemmican Dr. Cheadle mentions the fact that pemmican was used by the British Government in the expeditions to the Arctic. That pemmican was manufactured in England of the very best beef with the addition of currants, raisins and sugar; it was vastly superior to the coarse stuff which was the staff of life in the Red River Territories. In the North West, where transport is very limited, pemmican was invaluable as it contained a large amount of nourishment for a very small amount of weight and space. Pemmican was uncommonly satisfying and the most hungry traveller could only eat a very small serving. It had, however, one drawback; it was very difficult to digest and a full meal of it was prone to cause considerable suffering to an unaccustomed stomach.

On the 25th of September the travellers reached the South Saskatchewan River and the day after they arrived at Fort Carlton, having accomplished five hundred miles of their journey to the West. The Hudson's Bay post at Carlton was in charge of a Mr. Lillie.

The day after their arrival at Carlton the ground was covered with five inches of snow but the next day a thaw set in

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to be succeeded by more fine weather. On the advice of Mr. Lillie and their guides the two Englishmen decided that as the season was already getting late they would go into winter quarters among the peaceful Woody Crees near White Fish Lake, about eight miles N.W. of Carlton on the borders of the endless forest stretching to the northward.

Grizzly Bears and Buffalo

The whole party started out the next day but as reports had been brought in of two grizzly bears being in the vicinity, Milton and Treemiss started out at daybreak in search of them on horseback. Directed by some half breeds they rode on several miles and then came on the tracks in the snow which they followed for some distance. But as the snow melted rapidly they finally had to relinquish the chase. The footprints showed the animals to be of enormous size. The

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NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

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length was that of a man's fore-arm and the mark of the claws like the impress of human fingers.

The next night, while camped about 30 miles N.W. of Carlton an Indian brought word that buffalo were in the neighbourhood. Arising in great excitement the following morning their head scout La Ronde rode out and shortly reported a herd of nine buffalo bulls feeding a mile or so away and more buffalo in the distance. All the men mounted their horses and rode to within two hundred yards when the buffalo made off at full speed. As the hunters closed in for the kill the herd broke up into small bands and each hunter selected the one lying most favourably for himself. A succession of shots soon told that the slaughter had begun but all were quickly separated and each knew nothing of the success of the rest until the run was over.

The men found buffalo running a most fascinating sport. The wild charge into the thick of the herd, the pursuit of the animal selected from the rest of the band, which a well trained horse followed with every turn of the animal; the spice of danger in it from the charge of the wounded animals or a fall from the badger holes so numerous on the prairies, all contrived to render the chase extremely exciting.

There was something very comical in the appearance of the bulls as they lumbered along in their heavy gallop. Their small hindquarters covered only with short hair seemed absurdly disproportioned to the heavy front, with its hump and shaggy mane; as they galloped their long beards and fringed dewlaps swayed from side to side, whilst their little eyes rolled viciously, as they peeped out of the forest of hair at the enemy behind them.

In this run all the hunters were successful in obtaining an animal each. With hunting instincts still unsatisfied the three men started off on a hunt again. Soon it began to rain and then in passing through a bluff country they became separated. All finally arrived in camp by dark, except Treemiss, drenched to the skin and miserably cold. Shots were fired during the night at intervals but still Treemiss did not appear.

A Weary Night

Shortly after sunrise the next morning a party of horsemen was seen riding toward the camp and these proved to be Treemiss and a party of Cree Indians. It turned out that Treemiss had ridden his tired horse for hours in the dark and had then fortunately come across an Indian camp where he was most hospitably received. He was taken

into the chief's lodge, his clothes were dried and meat and Indian tea set before him. And then as a cordial he was treated to a mug of warm water mixed with grease.

Weary as he was, he found, however, it almost impossible to sleep that night in the Indian lodge. Both men and squaws turned out continually to cook meat, smoke or beat wandering dogs which in turn were seized as they dashed out of the lodge by other curs waiting at the exit. When morning came he was able to get his hosts to understand that he had lost his way whereupon they saddled their horses and, as if by instinct led him straight to the white men's

camp site. After giving a few presents to the Indians the party of hunters returned to Carlton which they reached on the 8th of October.

Milton and Cheadle had decided to go into winter quarters at once and on the 10th of October they started in a northwest direction from Carlton. In four days they arrived at the Shell River and the following day they came to a lovely little spot, a small prairie of perhaps 200 acres surrounded by low wooded hills and on one side a lake winding with many an inlet amongst the hills and into the plain, while here and there a tiny promontory richly clothed with pines and poplar stretched far into

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the waters of the lake. So struck were they with its beauty that they named it La Belle Prairie or the Beautiful Prairie.

Fort Milton Materializes

As far as can be ascertained from Dr. Cheadle's map this spot was approximately near Section 1. Tp. 52, Rg. 8, West of the 3rd Meridian. This would place the location of the white men's winter camp somewhere about ten miles west of the present day town of Debden.

The men lost no time in erecting a low log building of small size as it was now getting toward the end of October. The building in which these well brought up young Englishmen and two half breeds were to spend the winter was a rough log building of some fifteen by thirteen feet in size. The walls were but five feet high at the rear end and six in front. This was later remedied by digging out the ground to a depth of two feet inside making the building that much warmer and higher inside. The log walls were chinked with mud and grass.

A door was made from boards from the carts while a piece of parchment supplied the place of a window glass. A fireplace and chimney was next built and none too soon. On Oct. 23rd the lake was completely frozen over and two inches of snow covered the ground. Their work was finished only just in time. Such was the habitation these educated university men were to live in for five long winter months in the heart of the wooded country of Northern Saskatchewan. Imagine this if you can.

When Fort Milton, as they named their log shack, was completed, Cheadle and one of the half breeds, La Ronde, started for the plains hoping to secure enough buffalo meat for at least part of the winter. A camp was made and La Ronde and Cheadle started after a small band of buffalo that they had fortunately located nearby. The day was unusually warm and in a careless moment the two men left their leather shirts and parkas at the camp.

Nearly Frozen

The buffalo proved to be exceedingly wary and by the time the hunters had come up to them and had shot two, darkness had set in. It was impossible to fetch the horses and sleighs and carry the meat back to camp that night and if the carcasses were left the wolves would soon devour them. There was therefore no choice but to camp on the spot for the night. There was little shelter and the only wood was a few dry poplar saplings.

One buffalo was skinned and steaks cooked for supper. A bitter north wind now set in piercing the single flannel shirts of the hunters like gauze. They

had no blankets and so divided the buffalo hide into two. Cheadle crept under his half while La Ronde and a little Indian boy who had accompanied them crept under the other half.

At first the hide was warm and soft and the tired hunters soon fell asleep. But their rest was of short duration. Before long the sleepers awoke half frozen and benumbed in every limb. The hide so soft and warm at first had quickly frozen as hard as stone and formed an arch over their bodies through which the keen wind rushed like the draught under the arch of a bridge.

Sleep was out of the question and kicking aside their hide covering the shivering men stamped restlessly to and fro feeding with sparing hand the miserable fire while Orion sank gradually to the West. Morning finally arrived and after two more days hunting the men returned to Fort Milton. The tired hunters were warmly welcomed by Milton and Bruneau and the rough log shack seemed like a haven of refuge to the hunters who had slept out so many nights in the cold fall weather.

The Trap Line

The next day the white men and their Indian servants stored the buffalo meat up on a high platform to be out of reach of animals and where it would be kept frozen until needed. Their intention was now to start trap lines. The most valuable of the fur bearing animals common to this region were the silver and cross foxes, the fisher, marten, otter, mink, and the lynx. Of lesser value were the wolverine, the beaver, the ermine and muskrat.

The fur hunter's greatest enemy was the wolverine. This animal possessed cunning almost beyond belief. It seemed to be able to rob traps and destroy deadfalls with impunity. If a wolverine definitely attached himself to a trapper's rounds the trapper would be fairly beaten and driven off to another location. Cheadle took to the trapping very quickly but soon found that in a two-day's journey alone around a trap line, the silence and loneliness were almost unbearable.

Christmas at Carlton

The stock of flour and tea was now running low and as only a very small

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supply could be obtained at Carlton the two white men decided to send the two half breeds back to Red River to obtain supplies for the spring journey to the Mountains. On the 24th of December, however, Milton and Bruneau declared their intention of going to Carlton for the Christmas festivities.

They left the log shack in late afternoon travelling with a light dog team and sleigh. That night they camped at the crossing of the Shell river. Milton, eager beyond measure to get to Carlton in time for the Christmas celebrations, arose in the middle of the night and succeeded in convincing Bruneau that it was near daybreak. They therefore harnessed the dogs and started again. To their surprise the moon rose

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NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

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instead of the sun but they kept on their way and daybreak appeared after several hours. They arrived at Carlton just in time to sit down to Mr. Lillie's Christmas dinner, having accomplished the journey of eighty miles since the start of the previous afternoon. Plum pudding and a bottle of sherry graced the board and both were done full justice to by the assembled company.

The Corner Grocery?

La Ronde came in to Carlton on the 27th and on the following morning he set out with Bruneau on their distant journey. They took with them two dog sleighs and the best train of dogs to be obtained at Carlton. The provisions they expected to bring back with them were four sacks of flour and thirty or forty pounds of tea. The round trip of some 1,200 miles would occupy at least two months.

Back at the log shack again the white men passed the time hunting and were fortunate enough to share in the killing of two more buffalo. A band of nearby Indians were nearly starving, however, and most of the meat went to them. Early in the new year Cheadle went to Carlton to await the arrival of the winter express from Fort Garry bringing the letters for Carlton and the more distant points. Dog sleighs arrived from all parts, Edmonton, La Cross, Norway House, etc., bringing with them the mail for England and of course expecting incoming mail by return.

Dreadful was Cheadle's disappointment when the mail box was sorted to find not one letter for any of his party. They had naturally expected a large batch of mail as they had received none since leaving England. The only hope was that La Ronde might bring some when he returned from Fort Garry with the flour and tea.

Meanwhile the two white men passed the time as best they could. They were visited by hungry Indians many times and found them quite a nuisance. On the 11th of March, while sitting in the hut talking, the door opened and in walked La Ronde. He was very thin and appeared feeble and worn out. Bruneau arrived soon after with a dog sleigh on which were pemmican, a sack of flour, a small chest of tea and above all letters from home. These were eagerly seized and read and re-read and then read again and again.

A feast was made in honour of the arrival; pancakes were fried in profusion and kettleful after kettleful of scalding tea prepared. They had not tasted tea for many days and pancakes not for weeks. They sat up long after midnight listening to La Ronde's account of the journey and the news from Red River.

La Ronde had accomplished the 600 miles to Fort Garry in twenty-three days and after a week's rest had set out on the return journey on the last day of January.

The return journey was extremely difficult and at Pelly they had parted with a sack of flour to the starving people there. One other fact turned up during the conversation with La Ronde and that was that the two white men had contrived to manufacture three days as by their reckoning they thought it was March 14th whereas it was proven to be March 11th. This was one of the incidents of life in the North-West in 1862.

(To be continued.)

McKINNON LETTER

(Continued from page 39)

when addressing the Oxford County Federation of Agriculture, is reported by the press to have said, "I still believe that the United States' market is the natural outlet for Canadian beef cattle and this country must get back into it as soon as we can." This was only five weeks after the Lethbridge appearance of your Minister, yet he completely reversed himself. Small wonder our men are greatly confused.

At our recent Directors' meeting, it was voted unanimously that we take our stand in unalterable opposition to the state marketing of our products under contracts. "We are a free country of free men and we favor free enterprise, a system which has been responsible for the growth of this nation. We are opposed to state socialism, to communism and we will not desist in our battle for the restoration of the right of private export."

Mr. Prime Minister, in all of the years

in which I have actively engaged in cattle ranching, over 30 years, I have never seen such an unrest among our people. There is a feeling of frustration; a denial to them of what they know to be inherently and basically right. This matter of restoring the right of private export and the Cattle Industry to its rightful owners is a serious business. We implore you to give your personal attention to this matter. A continuation of present policy can only in our opinion undermine the confidence of the people in established authority and result in a permanent dislocation within Canada's Beef Cattle Industry.

We would deeply appreciate a reply to this letter. My apology for its length, but it could not have been shorter. A copy is being sent to each of your Ministers — Agriculture, Finance, and Trade and Commerce — and in due course it will be given widespread publicity.

Respectfully yours,

Chas. H. McKinnon,
President.

Reply

Ottawa, March 31, 1948.

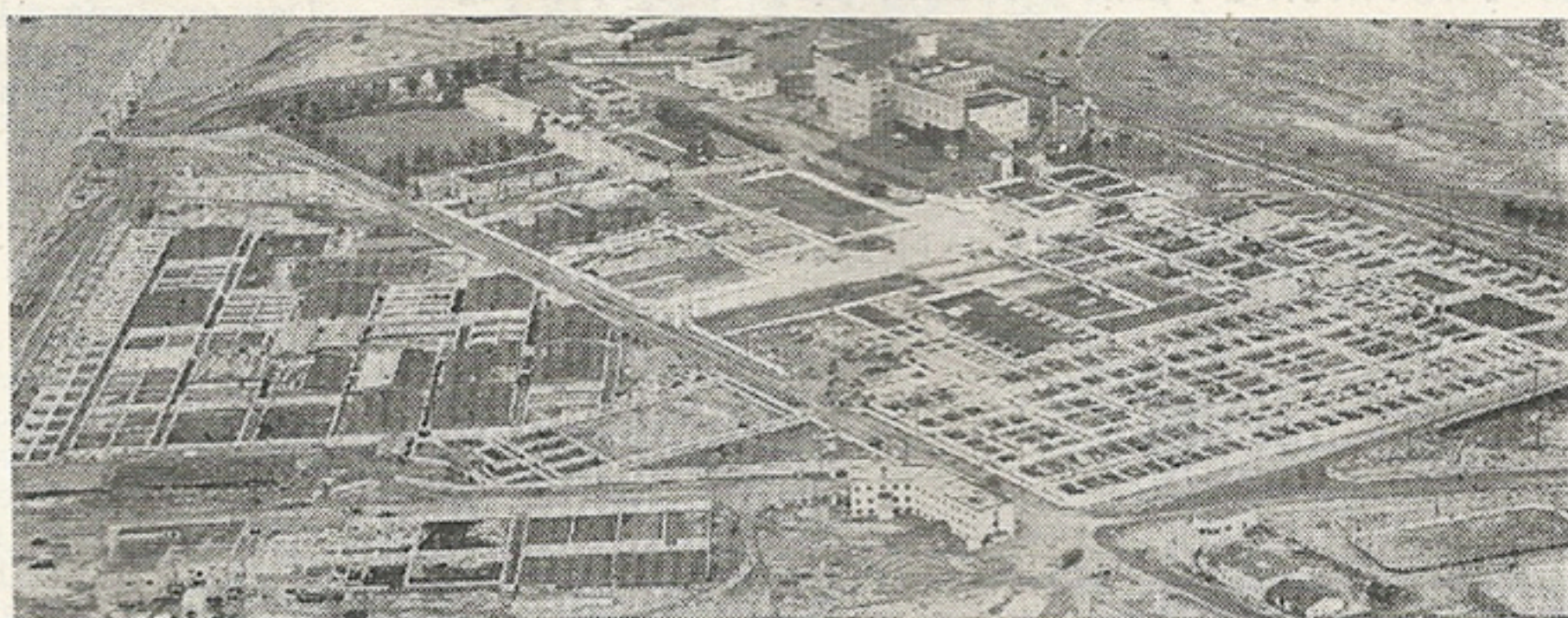
Dear Mr. McKinnon:

In the absence from Ottawa of the Prime Minister, I wish to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of March 27th, sent on behalf of the Western Stock Growers' Association, concerning the shipment of cattle to the United States.

I shall bring your letter to the Prime Minister's attention at the first available opportunity on his return to Ottawa. However, it is noted that you have sent copies to the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who, I am sure, will give every consideration to your representations.

Yours sincerely,

G. J. Matte,
Private Secretary.



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