

CHAPTER XXII

SCOTTISH OVERLANDERS IN 1862

THERE seems to have been a fascination, to those of Scottish race, in seeking out the newer parts of British North America which are now included in Canada. The spirit of adventure was cultivated by the fur trade, and the prizes to the fortunate danced before the eyes of those of Scottish lineage and courage. In 1862 the gold-fields of the Cariboo district in British Columbia attracted the attention of many Canadians. Many from all parts of the world flocked to Victoria and found their way up the Fraser River and by land-carriage to the lure of the goldfields. Exposure, scanty food, and the wearisome journey claimed many, who fell by the way and filled a lonely and now unknown grave. A fraudulent advertisement, published in Canada and England, stated that an overland stage route had been established from St. Paul, Minnesota, to the gold-fields of the Cariboo. It is true a branch of the celebrated Burbank stage had been begun, running as far as Georgetown, a settlement on the Red River, some two hundred miles from St. Paul; but the advertisement did not say that this

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left 1,500 miles of land travel still to be provided for to reach Cariboo. For young stalwart Canadians, who came to find out their dilemma at St. Paul, this was, however, no deterrent. At Georgetown 150 Canadians, young and strong, and many of them of Scottish blood, congregated and took the Hudson's Bay Company steamer *International*, then newly built, to make the journey down the Red River to Fort Garry. The steamer was new and untried, the river was shallow, the company, being large, were put on short rations, and the discontent was great. Fort Garry being reached, Governor Dallas, the new Governor of Rupert's Land, and the well-known Bishop Tache, who had been on board, left the travellers going on to the mines, and they began preparation for an overland journey of the great plains. At Fort Garry they were cheered by a service at the fort by the Scottish pioneer minister of the Red River, Rev. John Black, who had then been some ten years in the North-West. To the young adventurers the bracing air of the West, and their success in obtaining some ninety-six Red River carts, each capable of carrying 800 lbs., made without a scrap of iron, and in purchasing trained oxen or ponies, filled them with excitement. They engaged a French half-breed guide, Charles Rochette, who knew the route, but who afterwards deserted them. Their long cavalcade having started, the journey was made vocal by the creaking of nearly one hundred carts which could be heard half a mile away, until the party halted

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at White Horse Plains, some twenty-five miles along the trail, west of Fort Garry. Here they organised. The captain chosen by the party was a young Scottish Canadian, Thomas McMicking, thirty-five years of age, born at Queenston Heights, near Niagara Falls. He had been educated at Knox College, Toronto, and been engaged in school-teaching and business. After his arrival on the Pacific Coast he was made Sheriff at New Westminster, but was drowned in the Fraser River in 1866 while attempting to rescue his son.

Another leader among the "Overlanders" was Mr. Archibald McNaughton, a young man of Scottish descent who was educated in Montreal and was only nineteen when the company started on its journey. After arriving in the Gold Country, he followed mining for several years, and for more than forty years has held fast to "the Cariboo," has been a Government and municipal officer, as well as spending ten years in the district in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's business. His home continued to be at the junction of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers. His wife, Margaret McNaughton, has written an attractive brochure entitled "Overland to Cariboo," to which we are indebted for a number of our facts in this description.

A third of the Scotsmen of this notable expedition was Robert Burns McMicking, who is still living in Victoria, British Columbia, where he has for years held a high and useful position as an expert in telegraphy, telephone, and electric-

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lighting. Born, like the captain of the adventurers, near Niagara Falls, and named after one of the most noted pioneer clergymen and professors, Dr. Robert Burns, a Scot of the Scots, young McMicking, at the age of only nineteen, faced the danger and fatigue of the journey with safety. Another prominent member of the "Overlanders" was Mr. A. L. Fortune, who came down the terrible route by the Thompson River, and who has been an important pioneer at Enderby in the Okanagan Country of British Columbia. He was one of the committee chosen to advise with Captain McMicking on the route. He has been a staunch defender of the faith in the Church of his fathers, and has been seen at the Canadian Assembly as a representative Elder.

Another prominent man, who followed this Canadian party, is John Andrew Mara, of Scottish blood, who took up his abode at Kamloops, the junction of the two branches of the Thompson River, and was for many years an active representative in the Provincial and Dominion Parliaments, being for a time the much respected and capable Speaker of the British Columbia Legislature. Four other names, still well known in British Columbia, some of them of Celtic blood, are John Bowron, Gold Commissioner and Government Agent for the Cariboo; George Christie Tunstall, a Lower Canadian, Gold Commissioner and in the Lands and Works Department at Kamloops; John Fannier, distinguished for literary and scientific acquirements and as the

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organiser of the splendid Museum at Victoria ; as well as William Fortune, a prosperous farmer at Tranquille, near Kamloops. These all stand on the Honour Roll of those who crossed the plains in the party of 1862 and have gained the reputation of prosperous men. A detailed account of this remarkable journey across the plains cannot be given, but reference can be made to the prowess and perseverance of the large party on their journey. A hundred and fifty strong, and all armed and full of the spirit of Canadian Scotsmen, the presence of bands of Indians on their route caused them no further anxiety than the possibility of their horses being stampeded at night by prowling redskins or some of their possessions being stolen by thieves on the journey. At Fort Ellice, where there is a very deep valley to cross, accidents occurred to both man and beast, while the crossing of the Qu'Appelle River took place on a scow provided by the Hudson's Bay Company, on which a small toll was charged. After the desertion of their guide the leaders themselves took charge of the party. The trail was well marked, and when they reached Fort Carlton, north of Saskatchewan, they procured an abundant supply of buffalo meat. Fort Pitt, on the North Saskatchewan, was reached thirty-seven days after the departure of the company from Fort Garry, and Edmonton, a thousand miles from Fort Garry, after a further journey of twelve days. The party had learned to make temporary bridges, which a writer says would have done great credit to

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Cæsar himself. These were made by means of a rope used in hauling logs over the stream which was to be crossed. The patriotic Scottish adventurers were pleased to see the Union Jack hoisted in honour of their arrival by the Hudson's Bay Company officer on the flagpole of Fort Edmonton. A considerable French half-breed settlement was met at St. Anne's, a short distance out of Edmonton, and the wolf-dogs of this settlement made hearty inroads upon their pemmican supply, despite their best efforts to keep them away. A worthy Celt, Colin Fraser, the Hudson's Bay Company Factor at St. Anne's, showed them much kindness and cheered them in the evening by playing the bagpipes and arousing the Scottish spirits of the company. Journeying on, the party passed a most difficult country covered with dense brushwood and continuous swamps, bogs, and muskegs. On August 4th the vanguard of the travellers were overtaken in their encampment by Dr. Symington's party, the active postmaster being W. Sellers, a Scotsman from Huntington in Lower Canada. The party was much excited at seeing the thick beds of coal on the Pembina River, and at reaching the McLeod River, which flows into the great northern stream, the Athabasca. Sixty-five days after leaving Fort Garry the party got their first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains. Crossing the Athabasca, the travellers entered the Leatherhead Pass in the Rockies. Their journals speak of the majesty of the mountains, of the grand lightning and thunder storms they witnessed, until, following their difficult trail, they saw Jasper

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House in the distance. At length crossing the height of land, they reached the upper waters of the great Fraser River. Following down this precipitous stream they saw the entrance of two great rivers from the east, the Quesnel and the Thompson. The latter river joins the Fraser at Lytton, which is 180 miles from the sea. The fear of provisions failing the whole party led to a division into two companies and a divergency of routes. Those best provided with food—to the number of twenty—agreed to leave the main body and cross over to the Thompson and thus attempt by road to reach the Cariboo gold district. Messrs. Fannier, Thompson, Pitman, and A. L. Fortune, of the Queenston party, undertook this route, and with them went a German family, Mr. and Mrs. Schubert and their three children. The greater part of the company, however, decided to keep to the Fraser, terrible as the cascades, rapids, and rocky falls were seen to be. Rafts were constructed for each company coming from the same locality. In this way there was the *Scarboro* raft, the *Ottawa*, the *Huntington*, and the *Niagara*. For four days the parties fared well enough, but on arrival at the Grand Canyon and terrible whirlpool, though several portages were made, yet the rapids on being run almost compassed the destruction of the rafts. Strange to say, the rafts all passed down with comparative safety, but the "Toronto party," in a canoe, lost everything of their possessions, saving only their own lives. Here also a canoe of the Montreal company was wrecked. The Goderich party were even more

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unfortunate, Mr. Robertson, an expert swimmer, perishing before the eyes of his comrades. Two well-known men, Carpenter, of Toronto, and Leader, of Huron, were also lost in running a canoe down the dangerous Canyon. The Symington-McNaughton party, being eleven days later in arriving at the Yellow Head Cache, had to face the same dangers in descending the Fraser River. They found an enormous uprush of salmon in the river. With the Symington company was the Whitby party, and they took about the same time to prepare their canoes for the dangerous descent. This latter unfortunate company—the Whitby—lost all their canoes and were compelled to build others. At last the great party reached Fort George on the Fraser River.

The Thompson River company in their turn had a land journey to complete before they could reach Thompson River, which they hoped to descend. For two days there was a fairly good trail to follow. They now sent back their guide, André Cardinal, and undertook their two weeks' journey with much zest. They had to cut a way through the primeval forest, and this they did at the rate of five miles a day. The river seemed so desperate a channel that they first thought of cutting their road through the heavy forest. Then for a time they used wooden canoes which they constructed. For a while this mode of transit succeeded ; but they reached after seven days impassable rapids. Losing a kind-hearted Scotsman, Strachan, by drowning, the party at length arrived at Kamloops, having made a portage of eight miles, and

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by another series of rafts, and a good trail, having covered 120 miles. The wonder of this party was the successful journey of Mrs. Schubert and her three children. On the day after the arrival of her party at Kamloops Mrs. Schubert gave birth to a daughter—the first white child to be born there.

On the Fraser and Thompson Rivers six precious lives were lost. Various routes were followed by the remainder of the party of 150. Many went to the Cariboo diggings—some succeeded and others did not. Survivors in various parts of British Columbia have been described. The most of them gained a competence and spent their years as they journeyed to the sunset of life in peace.

The old miner is a feature of the Cariboo Country. James Anderson, a native of Fifeshire, Scotland, has, in the following verses, given his friend a glimpse of the old times :—

Dear Sawney, little did I think
That eighteen sixty seven
Wad see me still in Cariboo
A howkin' for a livin'.
The first twa years I spent out here
Were nae sae ill ava,
But hoo I've lived sin syne, my freen,
There's little need to blaw.
Like footba', knockit back and fore,
That's lang in reaching goal,
Or feather blawn by ilka wind
That whistles 'tween each pole—
Even sae my mining life has been
For mony a weary day
(Will that sun never rise for me
That shines for makin' hay?)