
CHAPTER VI

BRAVE SCOTTISH EXPLORERS

THE spirit of Alexander Mackenzie set on fire many of the younger men of the Fur Companies to explore the vast regions of the interior of Rupert's Land. It is the great man who points out the way, but facile and patient followers also do noble work for humanity.

Among those who followed closely in the footsteps of the Imperial leader was David Thompson, astronomer and surveyor of the North-West Company. There is some question about his nationality. Rev. Dr. Campbell, historian of St. Gabriel's Church, Montreal, states that a Robert Thompson, who was a subscriber to the Scotch Church, was a Scotsman and was said to be the brother of David Thompson, of whom we are speaking. It is stated by another authority that surveyor Thompson was a native of Wales, while Ex-Governor Masson says that David Thompson was educated at the celebrated Bluecoat School in London. Mr. J. B. Tyrrell, in his brief narrative of Thompson's journeys, states that the explorer was born in Westminster, London, but gives

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no clue to his origin, which was almost certainly Celtic.

Thompson was born in 1770, and it was probably in his nineteenth year that, having been well instructed in mathematics and the use of astronomical instruments, he was engaged in his profession under the Hudson's Bay Company. Five years afterwards he is found returning from a Western expedition and making the recommendation that he be allowed greater opportunity for exploration. Repelled in this request by the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge, the young man gave up his situation and betook himself to the meeting of the North-West Company in Grand Portage, and was by them immediately appointed as astronomer and surveyor for the Fur Company. He received orders to survey the International Boundary-line—the 49th parallel—explore the Indian villages on the Missouri, inquire into the national history and archæology of the Western country, obtain accurately the positions of the Western posts, and to enlist in all these things the assistance of the North-West Company agents. His work was to begin at once, and on coming westward from Grand Portage Thompson availed himself of every opportunity to fix the exact spot on which each of the posts stood, followed the watercourses, which he examined, coming in 1796 to all the posts on Lake Manitoba and the Assiniboine and Red River districts. His observations are generally accounted to be of much value. In the following year the

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ardent explorer made his great visit to the Mandans, or Troglodytes, of the Missouri River. In 1796 he sought the lake which was the source of the Mississippi River, but failed in finding the true source. After the union of the North-West and X Y Companies in 1805 Thompson was sent to the region west of the Rocky Mountains to survey the Columbia and other rivers, spending his time chiefly in the mountain regions. At this time Lewis and Clark, American explorers, having descended the lower parts of the Columbia River, gave by their action much anxiety to the Fur Companies as to the claim the Americans might make out of this. Proposals were in the air for the Americans to occupy the mouth of the Columbia River. In July, 1811, Thompson descended the Columbia River—the first ever to do so—as far as the junction of the Lewis and Columbia, below which Lewis and Clark had been first to reach the sea. Near the junction of the Spokane River and the Columbia Thompson erected a pole, on which was a claim to the country to the north as British territory. However, on going to the mouth of the Columbia River the Canadian explorer found that he had been anticipated for some days or weeks by the Americans. Shortly after this event Thompson, with his wife, a native, daughter of Mr. Small of the North-West Company, and his children left the West country, and he was employed as a surveyor in the Ottawa Valley. He lived for many years after this retirement from the Company, Glengarry County, Upper

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Canada, being his home. Thompson lived to the great age of eighty-seven years, and was in very poor circumstances. His energy, scientific knowledge, and ability as a leader, all made him a worthy member of the great Scottish Company which he so long served.

H. H. Bancroft, a historian of the Pacific Coast, says of the explorer: "David Thompson was an entirely different order of man from the orthodox fur trader. Tall and fine-looking, of sandy complexion, with large features, deep-set, studious eyes, high forehead, and broad shoulders, the intellectual was well set above the physical. In the Westward exploration of the North-West Company no man performed more valuable service or estimated his achievements more modestly than he. These were the qualities of a true Scotsman—even to the characteristic of his being able to endure poverty cheerfully, if that were his lot."

Another great explorer, whose name was given to one of the greatest Canadian rivers, was Simon Fraser. Fraser was born in 1773 on the Hudson River, when New York was a British colony. He was of Highland stock and the son of a Loyalist who fought under the King's standard. His father, Captain Fraser, having been taken prisoner by the Americans, died from hardships in prison, and his widow with her children fled to Canada. Young Simon left school in Montreal to enter the North-West Company at the age of sixteen, and rose to be a bourgeois in the stormy period of the "Little Company" in 1799,

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having two years before this date been in charge of Grand Portage. After the union of the two companies—the old Nor'-West Company and the new Nor'-West—Fraser was commissioned to cross the Rocky Mountains and deal with the Indians of the West Coast. In 1806 he went upon his mission and established at the head-waters of one of the coast streams a post—New Caledonia—which, it is said, gave this name to the whole region west of the Rocky Mountains. While in the Rocky Mountains an order came to him, borne by two explorers, Quesnel and Faries, commanding him to descend the "Grand River," "Tacoutche Tesse," which was then thought to be the Columbia River. This he was to follow down to the sea and if possible precede the American expedition, which was known to be making for its lower waters. David Thompson was also, as we have seen, under orders from the Company to seek by another route the mouth of the Columbia River.

On May 22, 1807, a start was made down this terrific river. We cannot follow the journey, which was a constant succession of dangerous descents. Fraser writes: "I have been for a long period among the Rocky Mountains, but have never seen anything like this country. We had to pass where no human being should venture." On July 2nd the party reached an arm of the sea and saw the tide ebbing and flowing. The natives prevented the brave explorer from reaching the sea, but, taking the latitude, he saw that the mouth of this river was some four degrees north of that of the

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Columbia River. One of the tributaries, whose mouth he saw pouring into the Grand River, he called "Quesnel," after one of his Company, and another was called the Thompson, under the impression that Thompson's party was then about the head of it. The whole river has ever since this famous voyage of discovery, 1808, been called the Fraser. After other adventures in the Fur Country Simon Fraser retired to live upon the banks of the Ottawa River; and here, at St. Andrews, continued until his death, at the great age of eighty-six.

Simon Fraser was a true Celt, quick-tempered, impulsive, and possibly overbearing. He was a man of intrepid spirit, and few could have made the marvellous river descent which he did. He was of the Jacobite immigration to the United States and a Roman Catholic, but his Scottish blood warmed to the land of his fathers, and he was one of a type which honoured Scotland by his devotion to the Crown of Great Britain, even when he knew that Bonnie Prince Charlie and his claims had gone for ever.

John Stuart, born in Scotland, was a companion of Simon Fraser. At times age, and precedence of others, tend to lessen the fame of very true men. It was so in this case. John Stuart is of interest to Scotsmen on account of his having been an uncle of one of our greatest Scotsmen of the present day, Lord Strathcona. He was a man of education, while Fraser was not. Stuart had the training of an engineer. It has long been

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understood among the fur traders that, without in any way detracting from the fame of Fraser, Stuart was the dominating force in the marvellous descent of the Fraser River. A lake high up in the Rocky Mountains is named Stuart Lake, while the branch of the stream from which the Fraser descent party proceeded was called Stuart River. Stuart remained in the Company's service for twenty years after the great discovery of the Fraser River, and became a Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company after the union. He returned to his native land and lived until the year 1841. For executive ability, rapid movement over long distances, and devotion to his Company there is perhaps no one who deserves greater honour as a reliable and useful Scotsman than John Stuart.

Douglas.—As the century passed on, explorers of various grades and on different quests came to Rupert's Land and New Caledonia. One of the most interesting and peculiar of these was a Scotsman—David Douglas, to be distinguished from the great Governor Douglas, afterwards to be described. David Douglas was a Scottish botanist, whose name is connected with a notable tree of the Rocky Mountains, the Douglas fir. At Kamloops there was a hot-blooded countryman of Douglas in charge of the fort. This was Samuel Black. Douglas was possessed of a candour which is a characteristic of a certain class of Scotsmen. He declared to Black that the Hudson's Bay Company was simply a mercenary corporation; "there is not an officer in it," he said, "with a soul above

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a beaver's skin." Black's Caledonian blood arose in revolt, and he challenged Douglas to a duel. It was fixed for next morning. Bright and early Black tapped at the window of the room in which Douglas was sleeping and cried out, "Mister Dooglas, are ye ready?" Douglas, however, disregarded the invitation. That the irascible temper of the Celt sometimes led him into serious trouble was shown in the case of these two men. Douglas was killed in the Hawaiian Islands, being tramped on by wild cattle; and Black, having been accused of using magic by the Shushwap Indians and of causing the death of their chief, was shot by a nephew of the dead man.

Campbell.—A notable man from Perthshire, Scotland, brought out by the Hudson's Bay Company as a shepherd, was another illustration of the large number of Scotsmen who by their own worth and merit have risen to high positions in the New World. This was Robert Campbell, who became a great fur trader, but whose most notable service to his Company and to Western Canada was the discovery of the Yukon River in 1838. Under orders of Governor Simpson, of the Hudson's Bay Company, Robert Campbell ascended the north branch of the dangerous Liard River. Reaching Finlayson's Lake, he was at the reservoir where at high water one portion of the water runs to the Pacific Ocean and the other to the Arctic Sea. With seven trusty companions, Campbell crossed the height of land and saw the cliffs of the splendid river, which he at first called

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Pelly Banks. The Company would have called it Campbell's River, but the discoverer refused the honour. Next year Campbell built two forts—one Fort Frances, so called after Lady Simpson, the other one Pelly Banks. Eight years after the discovery of Pelly Banks, Campbell and a party went down the river and erected another fort long called Campbell's Fort, but now known as Fort Selkirk. This was at the junction of the Pelly and Lewis Rivers. Two years later Campbell journeyed far down this united river—twelve hundred miles—now called the Yukon and came to Fort Yukon—a point which had already been occupied by the traders going out of the mouth of the Mackenzie River and sailing up the Yukon. Campbell, reversing the process, sailed down the Yukon to the sea, entered the Mackenzie River, and surprised his friends by arriving at Fort Simpson on that stream. Chief Factor Campbell then went to Britain and mapped out the line of his discoveries. In 1870 he retired from the Hudson's Bay Company's service and settled at Elphinstone in North-Western Manitoba. He was a man of stalwart build and of the highest motive. His courage and modesty blended beautifully in his Scottish character. He was married to a Miss Sterling, a daring Scottish woman, who with her sister came out from Scotland to be married to him, travelling by wagon and water upwards of a thousand miles from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Norway House on Lake Winnipeg. Those were days of Scottish pluck and devotion.

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Later Explorations.

The era of Fur Company explorations passed away and that of British and Canadian Government expeditions came in. The great movement of opening up the West to settlement may be said to have begun with the impulse set on foot by the Red River people which led the British Government to appoint the great Parliamentary Committee of the British House of Commons in 1857. Two expeditions, one from Britain, the other from Canada, in the same year went west of Lake Superior to examine the interior. These, the British expedition of Palliser and Hector and the Canadian of Hind and Dawson, had in each of them a prominent Scotsman.

James Hector, M.D., born 1834, was the son of Alex. Hector, W.S., of Edinburgh. He was a graduate of Edinburgh University and was the scientist of the British expedition under Palliser. He was a geologist, and Palliser said of him: "Dr. Hector, whose able assistance and exertions mainly contributed to the success of the expedition, was most indefatigable, not only during the general exploration seasons, but also during the several winter excursions, which he prosecuted on snowshoes, accompanied by dogs drawing provisions in sleighs, exposed to the hardships of an almost Arctic temperature." Dr. Hector was a man of great strength and application. After returning to Britain he was appointed Director of the Geological Survey of New Zealand, was knighted,

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and also became a Fellow of the Royal Society of London. He came over the Canadian Pacific Railway on a visit to his son on the way to Britain. On his journey the son died, and the broken-hearted father gave up his intention of crossing the Atlantic, and went back to the Southern Hemisphere. The greatest sympathy was awakened for him, a subscription was taken up, and a modest monument was erected at Laggan, near the crest of the Rocky Mountains, in commemoration of the exploration of Dr. Hector. The name Kicking Horse Pass, down which the Canadian Pacific Railway descends on the west side of the Rockies, was given from an incident which happened in Dr. Hector's party on their survey. Dr. Hector was Chancellor of the University of New Zealand, and died in 1907—an ornament to the Scottish nation.

Dawson.—The other explorer was Simon James Dawson. He was Scottish by birth and parentage. He came early in life to Canada and was a civil engineer by profession. In 1857 with Hind, he became a leader of the Canadian expedition which explored the prairie section of Western Canada. Their report was one of the best ever made of the Western country, and this was largely due to the scientific ability of Mr. Hind. In 1868 Dawson undertook to open for the Canadian Government the celebrated Dawson Route, including the Dawson Road. Forty-five miles from the eastern end of Lake Superior and 110 miles from Lake of the Woods to Red River were wagon

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roads ; the intermediate portion of 380 miles was a maze of lakes and rivers and really the old fur traders' route. This Dawson Route was utilised by Hon. Alexander Mackenzie to carry settlers from Port Arthur to Red River in anticipation of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was also to some extent used by Col. Wolseley in his Red River Expedition of 1870. Dawson took a considerable part in the public life of Canada, and was a useful and well-informed Scotsman.