

Wandering. Alonzo Dyer

I seem to have passed with one giant stride from Montreal to the Prairie, but as a matter of fact it is not until one has reached the Prairie, that the traveller meets with new conditions and new problems. He traverses Ontario with its prosperous mixed farms and its fruit growing villages, but the general effect is the same as in Eastern America. Then comes the enormous stretch of the Great Lakes, that wonderful inland sea, with great Ocean-going steamers. We saw the newly built *Nyronic*, destined altogether for passenger traffic, and worthy to compare both in internal fittings and outward appearance with many an Atlantic Liner. The Indians looked in amazement at La Salle's little vessel. I wonder what La Salle and his men would think of the *Nyronic*! For two days in great comfort we voyaged over the inland waters. They lay peaceful for our passage, but we heard grim stories of winter gusts and of ships which were never heard of more. It is not surprising that there should be accidents for the number of vessels is extraordinary, and being constructed with the one idea of carrying the maximum of cargo, they appear to be not very stable. I am speaking now of the whale back freight carriers and not of the fine passenger service, which would not be beaten.

I have said that the number of vessels is extraordinary. I have been told that the tonnage passing through Sault Ste. Marie, where the Lakes join, is greater than that of any port in the world. All the supplies and manufactures for the West move one way, while the corn of the great prairie, and the ores from the Lake Superior copper and iron mines move the other. In the Fall there comes the triumphant procession of the harvest. Surely in more poetic days banners might have waved and cymbals clashed, and Priests of Ceres sung their hymns in the vanguard, as this flotilla of mercy moved majestically over the face of the waters to the aid of hungry Europe. However we have cut out the frills, to use the vernacular, though life would be none the worse could we tinge it a little with the iridescence of romance. Suffice it now to say that an average railway truck contains 1000 bushels of wheat, that there are forty trucks in a corn train, the whole lift being 40,000 bushels, and that there exists at least one whale back which is capable of carrying 400,000 bushels, or ten train loads. The sinking of such a ship would seem to be a world's calamity.

We stopped at Sault Ste. Marie, the neck of the hour-glass between the two great Lakes of Huron and Superior. There were several things there which are worthy of record. The Lakes are of a different level and the lock which avoids the dangerous rapids is on an enormous scale, but, beside it unnoticed save by those who

know where to look and what to look for, there is a little stone-lined cutting no larger than an uncovered drain. It is the detour by which for centuries the voyageurs, trappers and explorers moved their canoes round the Sault or fall on their journey to the great solitudes beyond. Close by it is one of the old Hudson Bay log forts with its fire-proof roof, its loop-holed walls and every other device for Indian fighting. Very small and mean these things look by the side of the great locks and the huge steamers withing them, but where would locks and steamers have been had these others not taken their lives in their hands to clear the way?

I do want to take my hat off once again to the French Canadian. He came of a small people, at the time of the British Occupation I doubt if there were more than a hundred thousand of them, and yet the mark they have left by their bravery and activity upon this Continent is an ineffaceable one. You pass right through the territory of the United States, down the valleys of the Illinois and of the Mississippi, and everywhere you come across French names. Marquette, Joliet, St. Louis, Mobile, New Orleans. How come these here? It was the French Canadians who, when the English Colonies were still clinging to the edge of the Ocean, pushed round from the North into the heart of the land. French Canadians first traversed the great American rivers and sighted the American Rockies. Keep further north and still their footsteps are always marked deep in the soil before you. Cross the whole vast plain of Central Canada and reach the Mountains. What is that called, you ask? That is Mount Niéto. And that? That is Tête Jaune. And that lake? It is Lake Brulé. They were more than scouts in front of an army. They were so far ahead that the army will take a century yet before it reaches their outposts. Brave, enduring, light-hearted, romantic, they were and are a fascinating race. The ideals of the British and of the French stock may not be the same, but while the future of the country must surely be upon British lines, the French will leave their mark deeply upon it. Five hundred years hence their blood will be looked upon as the aristocratic and distinctive blood of Canada, and even as the Englishman is proud of his Norman ancestor, so the most British Canadian will proudly trace back his pedigree to the point where some ancestor had married with a Tachereau or a De Lotbinière. It seems to me that the British cannot be too delicate in their dealings with such a people. They are not a subject people but partners in Empire and should in all ways be treated so.

The other sight which interested us at Sault Ste. Marie was an Indian or half-breed school. The young ladies who conducted it seemed to be kindness itself, but the children struck me as mischievous little devils. Not that their actions were anything but demure and sedate, but red muting smouldered in their eyes. All the wrongs of their people seemed printed upon their cast-iron visages. Their race has little to complain of from the Canadian Government which has treated them with such humanity that they have really become a special endowed class living at the expense of the community. Still there is the perennial fact that where they once owned lake and forest, they now are confined to the fixed reserve. That no doubt is

the whisper which brings that brooding scowl upon young faces. They are a cruel people and in the days of torture the children were even more blood thirsty than the rest. They are a race of caged falcons and perhaps it is as well that they are not likely to survive the conditions which they loved.

By the way, I have never understood how anyone ^{tribe} could look at a number of Red Indians of any age or ~~title~~ and doubt where they came from. They are obvious Asiatics, Tartars or Chinese, with an occasional dash of Esquimaux. This seems to me to apply to the Indians as far south as Mexico, but if so, who peopled America before these wanderers came across? I have never heard of any primitive race unless it be the digger Indians of the South. There are no ~~vestiges~~ ^{outgo} of human occupation as far as I know which bear any signs of great age. Was the whole Continent an empty derelict till within a recent period, with only the wild beasts to wander over its vast plains and forests? I write ~~this~~ far from books of reference, but except an ancient skull dug up under doubtful circumstances at Calaveras, I cannot remember any signs of ancient man, though the extinct animals ran to size and number as nowhere else upon earth. On the other hand in Central America one comes at once upon the signs of ancient civilizations and of vanished Empires, founded apparently by races who came not from Asia, but either from the South or from the Sea. If one looks upon the monstrous figures of Easter Island and compares them with the Mexican or Peruvian statues, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in the one you see the germ of the other, and that the Central American and Peruvian Empires had their origin far out in the Pacific Ocean.

The Twin Cities of Fort William and Port Arthur, at the head of Lake Superior, form, I think, the most growing community of Canada. They call them Twin Cities, but I expect like their Siamese predecessors they will grow into one. Already the suburbs join each other, though proximity does not always lead to amalgamation or even to cordiality, as in the adjacent towns of St. Paul and Minneapolis. When the little American boy was asked in Sunday School who persecuted Saint Paul, he "guessed it was Minneapolis". But in the case of Fort William and Port Arthur they are so evidently interdependant that it is difficult to believe that they will fail to coalesce. When they do I am of opinion that they may grow to be a Canadian Chicago, and possibly become the greatest city in the country. All lines converge there, as does all the Lake Traffic, and everything from East and West must pass through it. If I were a rich man and wished to become richer, I should assuredly buy land in the Twin Cities. Though they lie in the very centre of the broadest portion of the Continent the water communications are so wonderful that an ocean going steamer from Liverpool or Glasgow can now unload at their quays.

The grain elevators of Fort William are really majestic erections and with a little change of their construction might be aesthetic as well. Even now the huge cylinders into which they are divided look at a little distance not unlike the columns of Luxor. This branch of human ingenuity has been pushed at Fort William to its extreme. The last word has been said there upon every question covering

the handling of grain. By some process, which is far beyond my unmechanical brain, the stuff is even divided automatically according to its quality, and there are special hospital elevators where damaged grain can be worked up into a more perfect article.

By the way, it was here, while lying at a steamship wharf on the very edge of the City, that I first made the acquaintance of one of the original inhabitants of Canada. A cleared plain stretched from the ship to a wood some hundreds of yards off. As I stood upon deck I saw what I imagined to be a horse wander out of the wood and begin to graze in the clearing. The creature seemed ewe-necked beyond all possibility and looking closer I saw to my surprise that it was a wild moose. Could anything be more characteristic of the present condition of Canada - the great mechanical developments of Fort William within gun-shot of me on one side and this shy wanderer of the wilderness upon the other. In a few years the dweller in the great City will read of my experience with the same mixture of incredulity and surprise with which we read the occasional correspondent's whose grandfather shot a woodcock in Maidens Vale.

Talking of moose, an extraordinary adventure befel the train in which we travelled, some few hours before we boarded it. In the middle of the night the engine, rounding a curve, crashed into a bull moose which was standing between the metals. I daresay the glaring headlights petrified the poor creature with terror. The body passed under the engine and uncoupled it from the tender, so that it ran on by itself leaving the train behind. It was only when the engine returned and the cause of the incident was searched for that the dead body of the creature was discovered at the rear of the train, jammed under the dining-car.

Beside the growing modern town I saw some rude mouldering shacks which are, as I learn, some of the wooden houses of the old original Jesuit mission of Thunder Bay, the farthest point reached in the old days by these brave priests, who reckoned that it took them always a full year in canoes up the Ottawa and along the chain of lakes before they could reach their parish. I am intensely conscious of how valuable every link with the past will be in the days to come, and I implored some leading citizens to remove one of these huts to their town park, to furnish it in the old fashion, and to piously preserve it for all time. I should be proud to feel that I had helped to rescue such a national possession.

The true division between the East and West of Canada is not the Great Lakes, which are so valuable as a waterway, but lies in the five hundred miles of country between the Lakes and Winnipeg. It is barren, but beautiful, covered with forest which is not large enough to be of value as lumber. It is a country of rolling plains covered with low trees with rivers in the valleys. The soil is poor. It is really a problem what to do with this belt, which is small according to Canadian distance, but is none the less broader than the distance between London and Edinburgh. Unless minerals are found in it

I should think that it will be to Canada what the Highlands of Scotland are to Britain, a region set apart for sport because it has no other economic use. The singular thing about this barren tree land is that it quite suddenly changes to the fertile prairie at a point to the East of Winnipeg. I presume that there is some geological reason, but it was strange to see the fertile plain run up to the barren woods with as clear a division as there is between the sea and the shore.

And now at last I am to the West of Winnipeg and on that Prairie which means so much both to Canada and to the world. It is wonderfully impressive to travel swiftly all day from the early summer dawn to the latest evening light and to see always the same little clusters of houses, always the same distant farms, always the same huge expanse stretching to the distant sky-line, mottled with cattle, or green with the half grown crops. You think these people are lonely. What about the people beyond them and beyond them again, each family in its rude barracks in the midst of the 160 acres which form the minimum farm. No doubt they are lonely, and yet there are alleviations. When a man or woman is working on their own property and seeing, as other people see, *these* their fortune growing, they have pleasant thoughts to bear them company. It is the women I am told who feel it most, and who go prairie mad. Now they have rigged little telephone circles which connect up small groups of farms and enable the women to relieve their lives by a little friendly gossip, when the whole district thrills to the news that Mrs. Jones has been in the cars to Winnipeg and bought a new bonnet. At the worst the loneliness of the prairie can never, one would think, have the soul killing effect of loneliness in a town. "There is always the wind on the heath, brother".

Land is not so easily picked up now by the Emigrant as in the old days when 160 acres beside the railroad were given away free. There is still free land to be had but it is in the back country. However this back country of to-day is always liable to be opened up by the branch railway lines to-morrow. On the whole, however, it seems to be more economical, if the Emigrant has the money, to buy a partially developed well situated farm, than to take up a virgin homestead. That is what the American Emigrants do who have been pouring into the country, and they know best the value of such farms, having usually come from exactly similar ones just across the border, the only difference being that they can get ten acres in Canada for the price of one in Minnesota or Iowa. They hasten to take out their papers of naturalization and make, it is said, most excellent and contented citizens. Their energy and industry are remarkable. A body of them had reached the land which they proposed to buy about the time that I was in the West. They had come over the border with their wagons, their horses and their ploughs. Being taken to the spot by the land agent, the leader of the party tested the soil, cast a rapid glance over the general prairie and then cried, "I guess this will do, boys. Get off the ploughs." The agent who was present told me that they had broken an acre of the prairie before they slept that night. These men were German Lutherans from Minnesota and they settled in the neighborhood of Scott. It may be hard for the British farmer, *least* unused to the conditions, to compete against such men, but at least it

must be clear to him that there is no use his ^{emigrating} ~~competing~~ with a view to agriculture in the western states of America, when the Americans are themselves flocking into Canada. The gains upon the farms are very considerable, it is not unusual for a man to pay every expense which he has incurred, including the price of the land, within the first two years. After that with decent luck, he should be a prosperous man, able to bring up a family in ease and comfort. If he be British and desires to return to the Old Country, it should not be difficult for him to save enough in ten or twelve years to make himself, after selling his farm, more or less independent for life. That is, as it seems to me, an important consideration for many people who hesitate to break all the old ties and feel that they are leaving their mother land for ever.

Everyone agrees that the Emigrant farmer should have a hundred pounds as a minimum for his actual start, apart from whatever he may have to give for the land. The man who has not the money must earn it before he can take over even a free homestead.

But it is not difficult for him to earn it if he is saving and industrious. Two or three years working for others, or better still learning his trade in some mixed farm in Ontario, would give him the ^{capital} pounds. It is to be noted that even in the corn-growing West the mixed farms are those which seem to give the best and most secure results. Hog raising, horse breeding, dairy produce - these are lucrative insurances against a bad crop.

There is no end to the agricultural possibilities of the West and North-West of Canada. There is only an end to the railway development, but that is being pushed forward as fast as the available Capital can be supplied. Up in the Peace River district, far to the North of the present grainlands, there is an enormous area where the soil is so luxuriously prolific that 50 bushels can be taken from the acre, and the wheat which has been sown in June can be gathered within ten weeks. There is room for a million large farms in this quarter. Considering how rich these farmers may become, and how long is the winter at that high latitude I should not be surprised to see the development of a large migratory population who would come with the early spring and in the late fall would descend to the warm pleasant places of the British Columbian Coast, there to amuse themselves until work time came round once more.

So much about farms and farming. I cannot see how one can write about this western part and avoid the subject which is written in green and gold from sky to sky. There is nothing else. No where is there any sign of yesterday - not a cairn, not a monument. Life has passed here but has left no footprint behind. But stay, the one thing which the old life still leaves is just this one thing - footsteps. Look at them in the little narrow black paths which converge to the water - little dark ruts which wind and twist. Those are the Buffalo runs of old. Gone are the Cree and Blackfoot hunters who shot them down. Gone too the fur traders who bought the skins. Chief Factor MacTavish who entered into the great Company's service as a boy, spent his life in slow promotion from Fort This to Fort That, made a decent Presbyterian woman of some Indian Squaw, and

finally saw with horror in his old age that the world was crowding his wild beasts out of their pastures. Gone are the great ~~lands~~ ^{herds} upon which both Indian hunter and fur trader were parasitical. Indian, trader and buffalo all have passed and here on the great plains are these narrow runways as the last remaining sign of a vanished world.

Edmonton is the Capital of the Western side of the Prairie, even as Winnipeg of the Eastern. I do not suppose the average Briton has the least conception of the amenities of Winnipeg. He would probably be surprised to hear that the Fort Garry Hotel there is quite as modern and luxurious as any Hotel in Northumberland Avenue. There are no such luxuries as yet in Edmonton, though the Grand Trunk Pacific is preparing one which will equal the Fort Garry. The town is in a strangely half formed condition, rude and raw, but with a great atmosphere of energy, bustle and future greatness. With its railway connections and waterways it is bound to be a large city. At present the streets are full of out-of-works, great husky men, some of them of magnificent physique, who find themselves at a loss and on account of cessations in railroad construction. They tell me that they will soon be reabsorbed, but meantime the situation is the crudest object lesson in economics that I have ever witnessed. Here are these splendid men, ready and willing to work. Here is a new country calling in every direction for labor. How come the two things to be even temporarily disconnected? There can be but one word. It is want of capital. And why is the capital wanting? Why is the work of the railroads held up? Because the money market is tight in London - London which finds according to the most recent figures seventy three per cent of all the money with which Canada is developed. Such is the state of things. What will amend it? How can capital be made to flow into the best channels? By encouragement and security and the hope of good returns. I never heard of any system of socialism which did not seem to defeat the very object which it had at heart. And yet it is surely deplorable that the men should be here, and that the work should be here and that none can command the link which would unite them.