

PREFACE.

SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE was one of the most energetic and successful of the discoverers who have traversed the vast wilderness of British America. He did his work single-handed, with slender means, and slight encouragement, at a time when discovery was rare and the country almost *terra incognita*. The long and difficult route, so recently traversed by the Red River Expedition, was, to Sir Alexander, but the small beginning of his far-reaching travels. He traced the great river which bears his name to its outlet in the Polar Sea, and was the first to cross the Rocky Mountains in those latitudes and descend to the Pacific Ocean.

Being a man of action, and not particularly enamoured of the pen, his journal¹—full though

¹ For a sight of which apply to the British Museum, London, or the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh.

CHAPTER II.

TERRIBLE DISCOVERIES AND ALTERED PLANS.

“HO!” ejaculated Swiftarrow.

“Smoke!” exclaimed Reuben Guff.

Both men spoke at the same moment,—their discovery having been simultaneous. At the same time Lawrence pointed with the blade of his paddle to a thin line of smoke which rose above the tree-tops into the blue sky, and was faithfully mirrored in the lake on which they floated.

“Injins!” said Reuben, resting his steering paddle across the canoe for a few seconds.

Swiftarrow assented with another “Ho,” and Lawrence moved his gun into a handy position to be ready for an emergency; but there was no further sign of man’s presence than the wreath of smoke. All was perfectly silent. The air too was quite still, and the surface of the lake resembled a sheet of glass.

“Strange,” observed Reuben, “red-skins ain’t usually so shy. If they mean mischief they don’t ever let smoke be seen, an’ when

they don’t mean mischief they gen’rally show themselves. Come, push on, lads; we’ll go see what’s i’ the wind.”

“I’ll show them the muzzle, father,” said Lawrence, laying down his paddle and taking up his gun; “it may be well to let ’em see that we have arms.”

“No need for that, boy. If they know anything at all, they know that white men don’t go about in the wilderness empty-handed. Put down the piece and use your paddle.”

Thus reproved, Lawrence flushed slightly, but obeyed the order and resumed paddling.

In a few minutes they were on shore. Still all was silent as the grave. Hauling the bow of the canoe on the beach to keep it fast, the three men took their weapons, and, entering the woods in single file, walked cautiously but swiftly in the direction of the smoke. They soon reached the spot, and the scene which met their eyes was one which, while it accounted for the silence that reigned around, filled their minds with sadness and horror.

In an open space, where a number of trees had been cut down, stood about a dozen skin tents or Indian lodges, some with the curtain-doors closed, others open, exposing the interiors, on the floors of which the dead bodies of Indian men, women, and children lay in every attitude and in all stages of decomposition. Outside of

the tents other corpses lay strewn on the ground, and most of these bore evidence of having been more or less torn by wolves. The travellers knew at a glance that these unfortunate people had fallen before that terrible disease, small-pox, which had recently attacked and almost depopulated several districts of the Indian country.

How the disease was introduced among the Indians at the time of which we write, it is impossible to say and useless to conjecture. The fact of its desolating effects is unquestionable. One who dwelt in the country at the time writes:¹—"The fatal infection spread around with a baneful rapidity which no flight could escape, and with a fatal effect that nothing could resist. It destroyed with its pestilential breath whole families and tribes; and the horrid scene presented, to those who had the melancholy opportunity of beholding it, a combination of the dead, the dying, and such as, to avoid the fate of their friends around them, prepared to disappoint the plague of its prey by terminating their own existence. To aggravate the picture, if aggravation were possible, the carcasses were dragged forth from the huts by the wolves, or were mangled within them by the dogs, which thus sought to satisfy their hunger with the

¹ See "Sir Alexander Mackenzie's Voyages," p. 14.

putrid remains of their masters. It was not uncommon at this time for the father of a family, whom the infection had not reached, to call his household around him, represent the terrible sufferings and fate that awaited them, which he believed was owing to the influence of an evil spirit who desired to extirpate the race, and incited them to baffle death with all its horrors by at once killing themselves—at the same time offering to perform the deed of mercy with his own hand if their hearts should fail them."

That some of the dead before our pioneers had acted in this way was evident, for while most of the corpses bore marks of having been smitten with the disease, others were there which showed nothing to account for death save a knife wound over the region of the heart.

It was a sad and sickening sight, and drew forth one or two low-toned sorrowful remarks from Reuben, as he moved slowly towards the tent from which smoke still issued.

The three men paused before it because no sound came from within, and they felt reluctant to disturb the awful silence. The pause however, was but momentary. Reuben lifted the covering and opened it wide. A small fire still burned on the hearth in the centre of the lodge; around it lay the bodies of dead men,

women, and children. Only one figure, that of an old woman, remained in a half-reclining position, but she was motionless, and they thought her dead also. This, however, was not the case. The flood of light which streamed in on her appeared to rouse her, for she raised her grey head, and, gazing anxiously at the figures which darkened the entrance of the lodge, asked in a tremulous voice: "Is that you, my son?"

"No, mother, but it is a friend," said Swiftarrow, who understood her language.

"A friend," repeated the old woman, shaking her head slowly, "I don't want a friend. The master of life is my friend. My people said that an evil spirit was slaying them; but I know better. It was the Great Spirit who came to us. We have been very wicked. We needed punishment. But why has He spared me? I was the worst of them all."

There was something terrible in the tone and manner in which this was uttered, as if the breast of the speaker were torn with conflicting feelings.

"She must have met wi' the missionaries some time or other," whispered Reuben.

"Is the old woman the only one of all the tribe left alive?" asked Swiftarrow.

"Ay, the only one—no, not the *only* one; my son is yet alive. He went to set a bear-trap

not *very* long since; but he should have come back before now. He will be back soon."

The deep sigh which followed proved that the poor old woman was hoping against hope.

"How long is 't since he left you, mother?" asked Lawrence, eagerly.

"Two suns have risen and set since he left, and he had not far to go."

"Father, I'll go seek for this man," said Lawrence; "something may have befallen him."

Reuben made no objection, and the youth set off immediately in a direction which was pointed out by the old woman.

After he was gone his father and the Indian shifted one of the cleanest-looking of the empty tents to a considerable distance from the spot where the terrible work of death had been done, and removing the old woman from the neighbourhood of the pestilential atmosphere, placed her therein, kindled a fire and cooked her a little food, of which she evidently stood much in need.

Meanwhile Lawrence sped through the pathless forest with the light step of a strong youth and the precision of a practised hunter. About four miles from the Indian camp he came upon the track of a bear, the footprints of which proved that it was an unusually large one. He followed it up closely, and was led by it to

a spot where some trees had been cut down, and not far from which he saw what appeared to him to be the remains of a trap. Almost at the same moment of his making this discovery he heard a growl, and saw the bear itself—a monster of the brown species, which differs from the ordinary black bear of America in being more carnivorous and much larger, as well as more savage and bold. No sooner did it see the youth than it rushed upon him with great fury. A piece of broken line was drawn tight round its neck, and another piece round its fore leg, while four arrows stuck in its shoulder and side, showing plainly that it had broken loose from a snare and had been attacked by man. But Lawrence had no time to think on these things. He had barely time to throw forward and cock his gun when the bear was upon him. It rose on its hind legs, and in doing so towered high above the youth, who, whatever his feelings might have been, looked undismayed. With an unflinching eye he took aim at the monster's heart, and shot it dead. So close was it to him that he singed the hair on its breast and had to leap to one side to avoid being struck as it fell.

Reloading quickly, the young hunter advanced towards the trap, where his worst fears were realized, for near to it he found the body of an Indian torn limb from limb, and mostly eaten,

except the head, which remained entire. It was evident that the poor man, having set several snares for bears, had gone to visit them, and found this brown bear caught by the head and leg. He seemed to have tried to kill it with arrows, but must have been afraid to go near enough to use his weapons with effect, and the enraged animal, having broken the snare, flew upon him and tore him to pieces.

Brown bears of this kind are very powerful. One traveller in these regions saw the footprints of a large one, which having seized a moose-deer in a river, dragged it for a quarter of a mile along the sandy banks, and afterwards devoured it all except part of the hind quarters; and the moose which had been treated in this unceremonious way, judging from the size and hardness of the bones, must have been upwards of a year old, when it would weigh as much as an ox of the same age.

Collecting the scattered remnants of the unfortunate Indian, who was no other than the old woman's son, Lawrence covered them over with leaves and sticks. He then skinned the bear and cut off its claws, which he carried away as trophies, along with one or two choice steaks cut from the creature's flank. He also collected the weapons and part of the dress of the Indian, with which he returned to the camp.

"Heyday! Lawrence, what have you got there, lad?" said Reuben, as his son came up and threw the bundle on the ground.

"A brown bear, father."

"Well done!" exclaimed Reuben, with a look of pride, for although his son had shot many a black bear in the forest, he had never before stood face to face with such a monster as that whose skin and claws now lay at his feet.

"It would have been well, father," said Lawrence gravely, "if the man who first saw this bear had owned a gun. His arrows were no better than needles in such a hide. See here!"

He drew from his breast the bloody portions of dress which had belonged to the slaughtered Indian.

"The son of the old woman has gone to the happy hunting-grounds," said Swiftarrow, referring to the heaven of the Indian, as he lifted and examined the dress.

"Ay, ay," said Reuben sadly, "'tis the chances of the wilderness. You'd better tell the poor old creetur', Swiftarrow; you understand her ways and lingo better than me."

Silently the Indian went to the old woman, and laid the bloody garments before her. At first she did not understand what had happened. Suddenly the truth flashed upon her,

and she looked quickly up into the grave countenance of the Indian, but death and sorrow appeared to have already done their worst on her, for she neither spoke nor wept for some time. She took up the shreds of cloth and turned them over tenderly; but neither sign nor groan escaped her. Evidently she had been already so stunned by the horrors which had surrounded her for some time, that this additional blow did not tell—at least, not at first—but Reuben observed, while trying to comfort her some time afterwards, that a few tears were coursing slowly down her withered cheeks.

That night, round the camp fire, the pioneers held earnest counsel, and resolved, sadly but firmly, that their projected journey must be given up for that season.

"It's a hard thing to do," said Reuben, as he lay at full length before the fire after supper, "to give up our plans after comin' so far; but it ain't possible to carry that old ooman along with us, an' it's not to be thought of to leave her behind to starve, so there's nothin' for it but to go back an' take her wi' us to the settlements. I would feel like a murderer if I was to leave one o' God's creeturs to perish in the wilderness. What think you, Lawrence?"

"I think you are right, father," replied the youth, with a deep sigh.

"An' what says Swiftarrow?"

"Go back," was the Indian's prompt and laconic answer.

"Well, then, we're all agreed, so we'll turn back on our trail to-morrow; but I shall try again next year if I'm above ground. I once know'd a Yankee who had what he called a motto, an' it was this, 'Never give in, 'xcept w'en yer wrong.' I think I'll take to that motto. It seems to me a good 'un."

In proof, we presume, of his sincerity, Reuben Guff rolled himself in his blanket, stretched his feet towards the fire, pillowed his head on a bundle of moss, and at once *gave in* to the seductive influences of sleep; an example which was so irresistible that his companions followed it without delay.

CHAPTER IX.

DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE UNKNOWN WILDERNESS.

NEXT day the arduous work of cutting a road through the forest and up the mountain-side was begun.

At daybreak their leader assembled the men. "Now, my lads," said he, "the work before us for the next two or three days will be very stiff, but it would be a disgrace to us if, after having come so far, we were so soon—only a little beyond the middle of May—to give in because of a few difficulties. Besides, I am strongly of opinion that we cannot now be far from the height of land, and you know well enough that the moment we set foot on the other side of the topmost ridge of the mountains it will be all down stream. Let us set to work, then, with a will. Take your axes and cut your way through everything. The trees here are, as you see, of small growth. Cut those of them that stand conveniently in such a way as that they shall fall parallel with the intended road, but don't sever them quite through so that they

make a sort of railing on each side.—Come, Lawrence, I'm glad to see that you are ready to begin, like a good pioneer—show them an example.”

Lawrence, who was the only one of the listening band who chanced to have his axe on his shoulder, smiled when thus addressed, and, turning round, exclaimed “Voilà!” as he swayed the axe aloft and sent it sweeping at one stroke through a young tree, which fell with a crash and covered half of the party with its branches.

A general laugh followed, and immediately the whole band set to work with their axes, headed by Mackenzie himself.

From early morning till sunset they toiled during the next three days, almost without cessation, except for meals. They cut their way from the margin of the river, where the rocks and ground shelved so steeply that one false step of any of the men would have been followed by a headlong plunge into the water. Over the ridge, and down into a hollow beyond, and up the mountain farther on, they hewed a broad track, by which they conveyed the baggage and then carried up the canoe. This latter was an extremely difficult operation at the first part of the road, requiring the united efforts of the whole party. Being lifted on the shoulders of some of the men, the tracking-rope was fastened to the bow, and others of the party

went in advance and took a couple of turns of the rope round a stump. The bearers then advanced steadily up the steep side of the mountain till they reached those who, by holding on to the rope, relieved them of any downward weight. The rope was then shifted to a stump farther up, and the advance was continued. Thus they may be said to have warped the canoe up the mountain! By two in the afternoon everything was got to the summit. Then Mackenzie, axe in hand, led the way forward. The progress was slow, the work exhausting. Through every species of country they cut their way. Here the trees were large and the ground encumbered with little underwood; there, the land was strewn with the trunks of fallen timber, where fire had passed with desolating power years before, and in its place had sprung up extensive copses of so close a growth, and so choked up with briars, that it was all but impossible to cut through them. Poplar, birch, cypress, red-pine, spruce, willow, alder, arrow-wood, red-wood, liard, and other trees,—all fell before the bright axes of the *voyageurs*, with gooseberry-bushes, currant-bushes, briars, and other shrubs innumerable. It must not be supposed that they did this heavy work with absolute impunity. No, there was many a bruise and blow from falling trees, and even the shrubs were successful not only in tearing

trousers and leggings, but also in doing considerable damage to skin and flesh. So toilsome was the labour, that at the close of one of the days they had advanced only three miles.

On the afternoon of the third day they finally came out in triumph on the banks of the river above the cascades, having cut a road of about nine miles in extent.

Once again, then, behold them afloat and paddling up stream—still westward—with hopes animated and fortune smiling, or, as Reuben put it, with “a gale of luck blowin’ right astarn.” Reuben, he it observed, had consorted with sailors in his day, down the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and had picked up a little of their slang.

But their good fortune never lasted long at a time. Their progress being very slow, it was found advisable to send the young Indian interpreters on shore, to lighten the canoe and to hunt as they advanced. They frequently killed elk and other game. On one of these occasions Swiftarrow was nearly killed. He had been sent to fetch the choice parts of an elk which they had shot, when a big rock fell from the cliffs above, and was dashed to pieces at his very feet. Just after this incident a violent fall of rain took place, obliging them to remain in camp for a day. Then driftwood barred the river, and an opening had to be forced through

it. Then more cascades appeared to check their advance; and, worst of all, just as they began to hope that the height of land was gained, an opening in the hills revealed a range of blue mountains far ahead of them, running south and north as far as the eye could reach. To add to their perplexities, they came to a fork in the river, one branch running due west, the other in a southerly direction.

“Follow the westerly branch,” said one; “that *must* be the right one.”

“Not so sure o’ that,” observed Reuben; “the end of a track don’t needsesarily pint out the gin’ral run of it.”

“You are right, Reuben,” said Mackenzie; “besides, I have been warned of this very branch by an old Indian whom I met last winter, and who said he had been up here in his youth. Therefore, though appearances are against it, I shall follow the southern branch.”

Mackenzie was right in this determination, as it afterwards proved, but most of his men grumbled very much at the time, because the southerly branch, besides appearing to be the wrong one, was a very rapid and dangerous stream. They knew by that time, however, that nothing could bend their leader’s will, so they submitted, though with a bad grace.

Here an immense number of beaver were seen, and a gladsome sight it was to the fur

trader, because beaver skins at that time were in great repute—silk hats not having, as yet, beaten them off the field and reduced their value to almost nothing! In some places these sagacious and busy animals had cut down several acres of large poplars. At this place, too, they had an alarm, some of the men declaring that they had heard shots fired by Indians in the woods. A whole night was therefore spent on the *qui vive*, although it turned out to be a false alarm.

One morning, the weather being fine and the river more manageable than usual, Mackenzie landed with Reuben and the two Indians, to ascend an adjacent mountain, telling his men to proceed in the canoe diligently, and directing them to fire two shots if they should require his return, agreeing that he would do the same if he should wish them to wait for him. Nothing was gained by this attempt to obtain a better prospect. On descending to the river they fired two shots, as agreed on, but no answer was received. Again they tried it, but the deep silence was only broken by an echo and by the rushing of the river.

"They're behind us," suggested Reuben.

"They've overshot us," said the Indians.

Again two shots were fired, but still no reply came. Mackenzie's mind was at once filled with anxious fears lest some accident

should have befallen his canoe, while he reproached himself for having left them even for a brief period in such dangerous navigation.

In these circumstances he turned to consult with his men.

"It's my opinion," said Reuben, "that they've discovered more rapids than they bargained for, and are out of earshot behind us; so we'd better make tracks down stream till we find 'em."

"Not so," said the elder of the Indians; "without doubt the canoe is dashed to pieces, and our comrades are even now with their forefathers. We shall see them no more; and my advice is that we construct a raft and try to return on it to the lands whence we came."

Anxious though he was, Mackenzie could scarce refrain from laughing at the prompt way in which the red man had consigned his comrades to destruction. "Come," said he, "we won't give them up quite so readily as you seem inclined to. We shall make at least one effort to find them."

It was now arranged that Reuben and one of the Indians should remain at the spot where they then were, kindle a large fire, and send branches down the stream from time to time, as a signal to their comrades if they chanced to be below, and that Mackenzie with the other

Indian should walk up the bank of the river several miles. This was done; but they returned after some hours to the fire, having seen nothing of the canoe.

As evening was now approaching, they became thoroughly alarmed, and a more rigorous plan of search was instituted. Reuben was sent off with one Indian to proceed down the river as far as he could go before night came on, with directions to continue the journey in the morning as far as to the place where they had encamped the preceding evening. Mackenzie with the other Indian again went off up the river, intending to make a thorough search in that direction. They had no food with them, but, having their guns and the means of making fire, they had no anxiety on that score, except in regard to an immediate meal, for game was scarcer than usual at that particular spot.

It was agreed that if both should fail of success, they were to return to the place where they then separated. But their anxieties were brought to an end sooner than they had hoped for. Not very long after parting, Mackenzie heard a very far-off shot, and then another, and in a few minutes an answering double shot at a still greater distance. These being the concerted signals, he knew that the canoe party must have been discovered by Reuben; he

therefore retraced his steps with a light heart, despite the fact that he had worn the moccasins off his feet, and was completely drenched with rain. It turned out that the delay had been occasioned by the breaking of the canoe, and the consequent necessity of landing to repair damages. Indeed, the sorely-battered craft had become almost a wreck. As a fitting climax to this disastrous day, the night finished off with thunder, lightning, and rain.

While thus forcing their way to the headwaters of the river, they met with a small party of miserable-looking natives, who received them at first with violent demonstrations of an intention to immolate them on the spot if they should dare to land. It was evident that the poor creatures had been subjected to bad treatment and deception by other and more powerful tribes, because they remained in a state of great suspicion and anxiety even after the interpreter had stated earnestly that the intentions of the white men were friendly, and after gifts had been presented to them. By degrees, however, they became more confident, and as their anxieties diminished their curiosity increased.

"I do believe," said Lawrence, "that the critters have never seen white folk before."

To most people it might have seemed ridiculous to have heard that bronzed *voyageur*

calling himself and his brown-faced, smoke-dried, weather-worn companions, by the title of white people; but Lawrence referred to the natural colour of the race to which he belonged.

"They do seem rather koorious," observed Reuben, as one of the Indians timidly touched his arm and looked wonderingly up into his blue eyes.

It was found, however, that these natives had heard of white people, though they had not seen them; moreover, they displayed a number of knives and iron implements which they said had been procured from people inhabiting the banks of a river which might be reached over a carrying-place of "eleven days in length," and which river flowed in an *opposite direction* from the Peace River. These people, they said, travelled during a moon to get to the country of another tribe who dwelt in houses, and these again extended their journeys to the sea, or, as they called it, the "Stinking Lake," where they exchanged their furs with white people, like our pioneers, who came to the coast of that lake in canoes as big as islands!

Here, then, at last, was definite information, and the enterprising discoverer was not long in availing himself of it. After gratifying his new friends with sundry little gifts, a feed of

pemmican, which they relished amazingly, and a taste of sugar to tickle their palates, he gained their confidence so much as to induce one of them to be his guide, and immediately pushed forward.

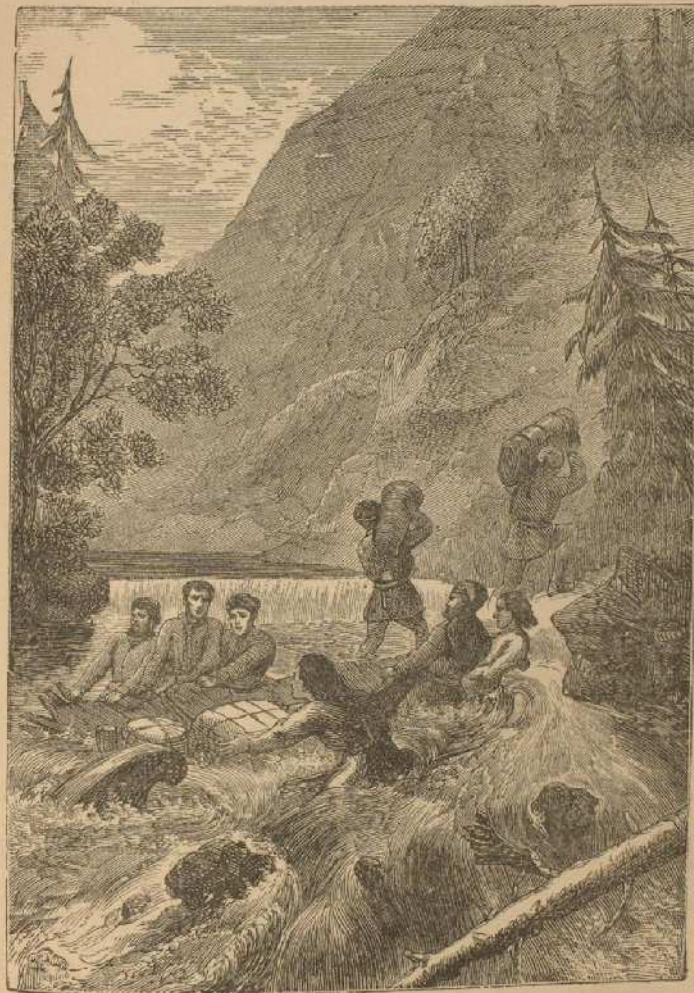
In the course of the following week they gained the much-longed-for height of land, and found two lakelets within a quarter of a mile of each other, from one of which the waters find their way through Peace River, on the east side of the mountains, into the Arctic Sea, while from the other the waters flow south and west through the great river Columbia to the Pacific Ocean.

But the succession of disasters that befell them here, and the difficulties of the route—for it could not be called navigation—threw all their previous experiences into the shade. One day, having made a portage, they relaunched the canoe and began the well-nigh forgotten process of *descending* stream. They had not gone far when they struck a rock and were driven down sideways with great violence. Mackenzie, followed by his men, jumped into the shallow to turn the canoe straight, but in a moment the water deepened and they had to scramble inboard again hurriedly. Swiftarrow by some mischance was left behind to struggle on shore as best he might. Before they could resume their paddles they struck again; the stern of

the canoe was shattered like an egg-shell and hung only by the gunwales, so that Lawrence, who was steering, had to quit his place. The violence of the stroke drove them to the opposite side of the river, where the bow met with the same fate. At that moment Reuben seized the branches of a small overhanging tree in a desperate hope of checking the canoe, but the tree proved so elastic that he was jerked on shore in an instant as if by magic, and the canoe swept over a cascade, where several holes were broken in her bottom and nearly all the bars started. At the same moment the wreck fell flat on the water; all the men jumped out, and Ducette, whose courage forsook him, shouted, "Save yourselves!"

"Not so! Hold on to the canoe, men," cried Mackenzie sternly. The men obeyed, and thus prevented the total loss of everything. Yard by yard, on the verge of destruction they waded down the rapid, and guided the wreck into shallow water, where some held her fast while the others, who were quickly joined by Reuben and Swiftarrow, carried the lading safely ashore. On this occasion several things were lost, the chief of these being their whole stock of bullets, but they had plenty of shot left from which ball could be made.

One might have thought this was at last sufficient to have turned them back—so at



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least thought most of the men, who began to look rebellious—but Mackenzie partly compelled, partly encouraged, them to advance. The canoe was dragged ashore and repaired, or rather reconstructed, and eventually through indescribable difficulties he reached the navigable stream which forms the head waters of the Columbia River. This he descended a considerable distance, and met with many of the natives, who told him that the country below abounded with game and the river with fish; but as the course of the latter ran towards the south, and the distance by it to the sea was described as being extremely great, he deemed it advisable to retrace his course a short way and then strike westward overland to the Pacific.

The old canoe being now little better than a wreck, birch bark was procured and a new canoe built, after which the stream was ascended until a spot was reached where the natives were in the habit of starting overland for the sea coast. Here the canoe was hidden, an Indian guide procured, and then these indomitable pioneers prepared to cross the wilderness on foot.

it be of important and most interesting facts—is a bare and unadorned though valuable record of progress made, of work done, which is unsuited to juvenile minds, besides being bulky and scarce.

Having spent some years in Rupert's Land, and seen something of Red Indian and fur-trading life, I have ventured to weave the incidents of Sir Alexander's narratives into a story which, it is hoped, may prove interesting to the young—perchance, also, to the old.

I take this opportunity of acknowledging myself deeply indebted to Sir Alexander's daughter, Miss Mackenzie, and to his two sons, for kindly placing at my disposal all the information in their possession.

R. M. B.

EDINBURGH, 1872.

PREFACE.

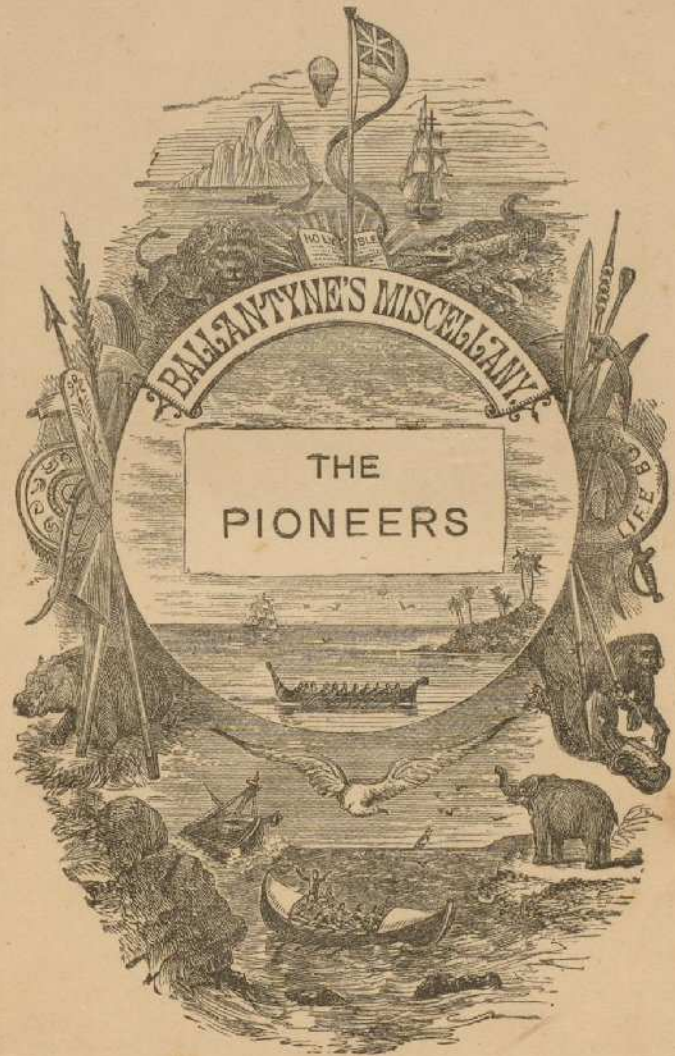
SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE was one of the most energetic and successful of the discoverers who have traversed the vast wilderness of British America. He did his work single-handed, with slender means, and slight encouragement, at a time when discovery was rare and the country almost *terra incognita*. The long and difficult route, so recently traversed by the Red River Expedition, was, to Sir Alexander, but the small beginning of his far-reaching travels. He traced the great river which bears his name to its outlet in the Polar Sea, and was the first to cross the Rocky Mountains in those latitudes and descend to the Pacific Ocean.

Being a man of action, and not particularly enamoured of the pen, his journal¹—full though

¹ For a sight of which apply to the British Museum, London, or the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh.



A WILD-GOOSE CHASE.



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