

Sir Alexander Mackenzie
Explorer and Fur-trader

Humphrey Hume Wrong

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**SIR ALEXANDER
MACKENZIE**

EXPLORER AND FUR-TRADER

BY

HUME WRONG

*Assistant Professor of History
University of Toronto*

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SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

The scene is the shore of a winding inlet of the Pacific Ocean in the mountainous and broken coast of northern British Columbia. It is a brilliant morning in July. On the west side of the inlet, about half way between its head and the open sea, a small point ends in a large rock with steep sides and a level grassy top. On this rock is gathered a group of toil-worn and anxious men, two Scots, six French Canadians, and three Indians, one an unwilling member of the party and trembling with fear. They have spent a restless night on the rock; now some are keeping watch up and down the inlet, for hostile Indians are nearby and an attack is feared; others are hastily packing up their belongings so as to be ready for instant departure. A little apart from the rest, one, whose dress and bearing mark him as the leader, bends over some astronomical instruments, making observation after observation so as to determine the exact spot which the party has reached. He is of middle height and strongly built; his face of strikingly handsome, with delicate, clean-cut

features, wide-set eyes, and a high forehead; his expression is that of a man sure of his own power, on whom authority sits lightly.

Suddenly a few Indians appear in canoes. They land at the foot of the rock, and, crowding round the commander, examine his instruments with curiosity. The French Canadians, after muttering apprehensively to each other, approach to urge instant departure, asking whether they are to stay to be sacrificed; the nervous Indian of their party is so terror-struck that he foams at the mouth. The commander answers his men calmly that he will not stir until his object has been accomplished. Finishing his calculations, he busies himself with a new task. Melting a little fat over the fire, he stirs into it some powdered vermilion; then, going down to the water's edge where the surface of the rock is smooth and steep, he traces an inscription on it with this improvised paint. At last, his purpose fulfilled, he consents to allay the fears of his followers, and boards the laden canoe. It is swiftly propelled by the paddles of the voyageurs up the inlet in the direction from which it had come. The party vanishes, leaving only the red memorial on the rock behind. It is the brief record of a great achievement. This is how it runs: "*Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three.*" For the first time white men had crossed the continent of North America north of Mexico. Thousands of miles of river and lake and mountain-trail lay behind the dauntless leader and his little band. Alexander Mackenzie had earned his place among the great explorers of history.

The scene on that July day was the summit of his career, though he has other titles to fame. Of his early years little is known. He was born of a good, though poor, Highland family in the Scottish town of Stornoway in the Island of Lewis, the largest of the Hebrides. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but it must have been within three or four years of 1758. The year 1763, given on the authority of his grandson, has of late been accepted; but recently a letter has come to light written by him from Canada in 1778 to his brother in Stornoway, and this is certainly not the work of a boy of fifteen. Growing up in that rough island, in his boyhood he must have become used to hardship, a severe climate, and an active life. Like many of his contemporaries, he was drawn as a lad to see his fortune in the new world. The names of Mackenzie, McGillivray, McTavish, Macdonald, Cameron, Grant, and many others which betray their Scottish origin, abound with bewildering profusion in the annals of Canada in the years after the conquest from the French. Scotland was a country poor in resources, but she gave to her children character, education, and strength of body, before she sent them abroad to earn the rewards she could not offer them at home. They in return rendered to her an unbounded devotion, sang her praises in every quarter of the globe, and often returned to die in her arms.

The year of Mackenzie's arrival in Canada is also not definitely known. The date of 1779 is that most frequently given; but, in the letter just mentioned, we find Mackenzie acknowledging in June, 1778, the receipt of a parcel of clothes from Scotland for which he had written the year before, complaining of the high prices charged for them and of the conduct of another brother who was also in Canada.

From this it appears that he came out in 1776 at the latest, and possibly earlier; some put the date as early as 1771. In 1779 he entered the service of John Gregory, a prominent merchant of Montreal who had a considerable interest in the fur-trade, and for the next five years he was employed in his office. There he learnt much, and rapidly won Gregory's regard and confidence. But his was not a disposition to be satisfied with the routine of ordinary commerce, and in 1784 he went on an independent trading venture, with an outfit of goods supplied by Gregory, to seek his fortune in Detroit, then a small backwoods town. During that winter the course of events in the Canadian fur-trade served to give the young Highlander an opportunity of proving his mettle. To make clear how this came about it is necessary to glance briefly at the history of the trade.

From the early days of French settlement furs, hunted by the Indians and bought from them by white traders, had been the principal export of Canada. As the settled area increased, the traders had to go further and further to secure their supply of skins. Two motives, the search for furs and zeal for the conversion of the natives, were chiefly responsible for the exploration of eastern and central Canada, though in the case of several explorers there must be added a third motive—the same which had prompted Columbus to head his ships to the West and had caused many gallant English sailors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to face the perils of the Arctic regions and Hudson Bay—the desire to find a passage from Atlantic to Pacific, from Europe to Asia. By the time of the British conquest the missionary impulse had died down, but the search for furs soon began to draw men of British race ever further across the prairies of the west and into the

inhospitable regions of the far north, rich only in animal life. Quickly the limits reached by the French were passed, and British traders were pushing into parts hitherto unseen by white men. The French had explored the Great Lakes, and finally, under the impulse of La Vérendrye's enthusiasm, had crossed the maze of waterways beyond Lake Superior until they reached Lake Winnipeg, the prairies, and the great Saskatchewan River. Here they tapped sources of supply previously touched only by the English of the Hudson's Bay Company. The traders of that company had been content to remain in their forts on the Bay, and had trained the Indians to carry their furs often many hundreds of miles for exchange there. The French first, and then their British successors from Canada, began to cut off the trade on the Bay by meeting the Indians at or near their hunting-grounds and buying their furs on the spot, thus saving them a long journey. In time the Hudson's Company was forced, slowly and reluctantly, to adopt a policy of competition inland. The North-West was thus reached from two directions, from Hudson Bay, the shorter route yet little used until the Company began to push its posts into the interior, and from the St. Lawrence by Lake Superior and the chain of rivers, lakes, and portages which connects that lake with the waterways of the North-West.

The new trade beyond Lake Superior proved very profitable to the adventurous merchants from Montreal. By the time of Mackenzie's arrival in Canada it was in full swing, and was steadily extending up the rivers which flow into Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay. A stream of adventurers crossed each summer into the *pays d'en haut*, as the voyageurs called the North-West. In this upper country there was no government and no law. The Hudson's Bay

Company possessed by its charter of 1670 wide rights of control, but these it had never exercised. The authority of the government of Canada did not extend beyond the borders of the colony, hundreds of miles away. In consequence there was no power to restrain the trade in their treatment of the Indians or of each other. Even murder could not be punished, because there was no court before which the defender could be tried. As the trade expanded, competition became keener and the methods of the traders more unscrupulous. When two or three traders competed in the same area the furs went to the highest bidder, and the highest bidder was generally he who consented to ply the Indians most thoroughly with liquor. All accounts are agreed as to the terrible effects of liquor on the Indians; as Mackenzie wrote, they were "great sufferers from their communication with the subjects of civilized nations." The traders resorted to every means, not stopping short of murder, to secure the furs, persuading the Indians to break their pledges to rival traders and to the Hudson's Bay Company. Unrestricted competition not only debauched the natives, but damaged the trade and extinguished such good opinion as the Indians had of the white strangers. Retribution threatened in an Indian rising in 1780, in which a few white men were killed; but before this had spread widely a far more disastrous scourge swept almost the whole North-West. Small-pox broke out, and, passing from tribe to tribe in many districts wiped out more than half the native population.

This disaster, together with the quarrels of the traders, made some organization of the fur-trade necessary to avert its extinction. Free competition had plunged the country into anarchy; control of some sort was essential. Probably the

best course would have been for the British government, unwilling to assume control itself, to have granted, under strict conditions, a monopoly of the trade to a strong company; this could have kept its agents under regulation, controlled their intercourse with the Indians, and prohibited the use of spirits. But it was an age of hatred for monopolies, and the charter of the Hudson's Bay Company stood in the way. In consequence the trade remained free to all comers in theory; but in fact the Canadian traders joined together in a voluntary organization which for forty years virtually controlled and governed a great part of north-western America, by reason only of its power to exclude competitors.

This was the famous North West Company. Its position was never unchallenged; to the Hudson's Bay Company it was an intruder in territories to which it had no claim, and powerful rival companies from Canada more than once entered the field against it. Though the powers it assumed were often grossly abused, it nevertheless proved itself to be one of the most remarkable commercial organizations in the history of the British Empire. Operating in an area as large as western Europe, made up to-day of north-western Ontario, the prairie provinces, the North-West Territories, and a great section of the United States, with the addition later on of British Columbia, it pushed steadily forward into new regions, and stocked the fur-markets of Europe, America, and China with supplies carried to tide-water for thousands of miles in canoes and on men's backs. The rivers were its highways, the canoe was its means of transport. It was organized like an army; the French-Canadian voyageurs were the private soldiers; it was officered principally by young Scotsmen as clerks; and at the summit were a few partners,

or bourgeois, most of whom were in charge of districts in the interior as large as many European countries, while others in Montreal looked after the supply of goods and the sale of the furs. It was directed by an annual meeting, a parliament of the fur-trade, at Grand Portage on Lake Superior (later moved to Fort William); here came each summer the partners from the interior, the winterers, bringing out their furs, to meet two of the partners from Montreal, the agents, and to procure supplies for the next season. Stern discipline was maintained and a regular system of promotion. The French employees could rarely hope to rise above the rank of guide or steersman; but before the eyes of the clerks there was always the prize of a partnership as the reward for zealous service. Certainly the North West Company, whatever its faults, inspired a fervent loyalty among its members.

The Company was founded in Montreal in the winter of 1783-4. Before that time the principal traders had formed several associations which had taken the name of the North West Company, but these had lasted for one or two seasons only. The agreement of 1783-4 was for five years, and it was ratified during the following summer at Grand Portage by all but two of the chief traders from the interior, The trade immediately improved; but the new combine had not satisfied the ambitions of all who felt they had a right to partnership. Of the two traders who had refused to agree at Grand Portage, one, Peter Pond, soon came to heel and proved the most vigorous of all the partners of the Company in the interior. The other, Pangman, went to Montreal, and there persuaded Gregory, Alexander Mackenzie's former employer, and McLeod, Gregory's partner, to join him in creating a rival company. It was a hazardous undertaking;

almost all the experienced traders were with the North West Company, and they would be certain to oppose a competitor with all the ample means in their power. If the venture was to succeed, it was necessary to secure men of character and determination. Gregory called to mind his former clerk, Alexander Mackenzie, now at Detroit; he seemed a young man of the right stamp, not easily daunted. So high was Gregory's opinion of Mackenzie that he had him made a full partner at once in the "New Company," as it came to be called. Mackenzie had not been consulted, and McLeod went to Detroit to offer him his partnership on condition that he would go to the far west in the spring of 1785. Mackenzie readily agreed, and at once left Detroit for Grand Portage to attend the first meeting of his partners. He had been given his chance, and he was to make the most of it.

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG FUR-TRADER

After travelling through Lakes Huron and Superior, Mackenzie joined his fellow partners, and the clerks and voyageurs whom they had engaged at Montreal, at Grand Portage in June, 1785. Grand Portage was the last outpost of civilization on the edge of a vast wilderness; and its civilization was only evident during the two weeks or so each year for which it was the meeting place between the

traders from the interior and the agents from Montreal. The men from the interior did not go further east, nor the men from Montreal further west. Here came the goods from Canada which were to be traded for furs the following winter—powder and shot, guns, tobacco, paint, kettles, blankets, tomahawks, knives, mirrors, ribbons, ornaments, and, of course, rum and brandy—all done up neatly into ninety-pound packages for carrying over the portages. They were brought in great birch-bark canoes nearly forty feet long, paddled by eight or ten men, and carrying over four tons; at the height of the North West Company as many as forty canoes were required. The canoes left Montreal early in May; the route was from Lachine up the Ottawa River, then over the height of land to Lake Nipissing and Georgian Bay; thence they coasted along the north shore of Lakes Huron and Superior to a little bay about forty miles beyond the present city of Fort William. This was the starting point of the Grand Portage, nine miles long, which gave the place its name. Soon after the arrival of the canoes from Montreal, the winterers from the interior began to reach the other end of the portage, in brigade after brigade of smaller canoes laden with furs, each manned by four or five voyageurs. The goods were carried up the portage, the furs down; and the voyageurs enjoyed a round of festivities while the partners, with much feasting and deliberation, made their plans for the next season. Then, one after another, the wintering parties went westwards into the wilderness; the canoes for Montreal vanished to the east; and the busy town became again a tiny village, occupied only by the caretakers of the Company's property.

Mackenzie found that the New Company could muster only a small establishment. There were but five partners, four clerks, and a small number of guides and voyageurs, most of them without experience of the upper country. It had required but eight canoes to bring its men and goods from Montreal, as against twenty-five used that year by the North West Company. Rapidly plans were laid, and four chief detachments, or "outfits," were sent into the interior. Mackenzie was allotted the department of the English or Churchill River, and John Ross, another partner, was sent to Athabaska, the most remote district of all and the most recently opened to trade. Mackenzie turned his back on the comforts of life; he was not to go east of Grand Portage for six years. He, a newcomer, with no experience beyond what he had been able to pick up in a single winter's trading under totally different conditions at Detroit, and with only a few trained men among his French Canadians, was called on to take up his station nearly fifteen hundred miles beyond Grand Portage, build his posts, and secure his furs, all in face of powerful rivals already in possession of the field.

The animosity between the companies had not broken out openly at Grand Portage, but it soon appeared in the interior. The general results may be given in Mackenzie's own words:

After the severest struggle ever known in that part of the world, and suffering every oppression which a jealous and rival spirit could instigate; after the murder of one of our partners, the laming of another, and the narrow escape of one of our clerks, who

received a bullet through his powder horn in the execution of his duty, they were compelled to allow us a share of the trade. As we had already incurred a loss, this union was, in every respect, a desirable event to us, and was concluded in the month of July, 1787.

Though the struggle was keen, there was no resort to force in Mackenzie's own district. It was rich in furs, and in 1786 and 1787 both he and his rival of the North West Company were able to bring out ample returns. His range was the Upper Churchill River and its tributaries, in what is now northern Saskatchewan, a region far beyond the limits of modern settlement and still not fully explored. After the first season he was joined by his cousin, Roderick McKenzie, who had apprenticed himself as a clerk to the New Company; the two remained for nine years in close association and warm friendship. Mackenzie's headquarters were at Ile à La Crosse, an important post which commanded the route to the Athabaska region. Here in the spring of 1787 he collected his men and furs for his second journey to Grand Portage. His intention had been to await the arrival of Ross and the Athabaska brigade so as to make the long journey in company; but after a few days' delay he was forced to depart without Ross, for fear lest a further halt should prevent his return before the ice set in once more. During his absence at Grand Portage Roderick was left in charge.

The assembly at Grand Portage was in full swing when Roderick suddenly arrived with dramatic news. In a light

canoe he had followed hot on his cousin's trail. The story he had to tell was that the men from Athabaska had reached Ile à La Crosse, but without their leader. Ross was dead, shot in a scuffle by his opponents of the North West Company. Peter Pond had been Ross's rival. He had been the first white man to enter the Athabaska region, and he regarded it as his special preserve. He was a man of ability and enterprise, but his character was violent and unbalanced; a few years before he had killed a competing trader. Against Ross and his men Pond had levied a private war. The news was startling; the partners of the new Company in consternation told it to their fellows of the North West Company. This outrage made a union of interests necessary. An agreement was reached by which competition between the two companies was ended, and this soon led to a complete merger.

In the new concern Mackenzie secured a prominent place. His ability as a trader had been proved by his two years' experience in the Churchill district. His enterprise and foresight soon made him easily the chief among all the wintering partners, although his experience was short and his age not yet thirty. The New Company had won its battle; three out of its four remaining partners became partners in the North West Company. Mackenzie had, by a successful shortcut, reached a position which might have taken him eight or ten years to gain if he had started in the service of the North West Company. The price, however, had been heavy; he and his associates had been plunged deep in debt; but, as usual, the Indians were the chief sufferers. In the reallocation of posts which followed the union he was given the most important and difficult department of all, Athabaska.

It was a position which required tact as well as enterprise, for Pond was still in the district and still a partner in the company. Mackenzie's first task was to get his canoes to their destination before the ice closed the rivers. He followed the regular route of the fur-traders, of which he has left a detailed description; he was already familiar with it for fifteen hundred miles to Ile à La Crosse. It ran by an intricate course, involving about forty portages, from Grand Portage to the Lake of the Woods, and down the turbulent Winnipeg River to Lake Winnipeg. Somewhere on this part of the journey Mackenzie's own canoe came to grief, leaving him "destitute of all necessaries and equipments for inland," and delaying him considerably. He pushed on up the broad waters of Lake Winnipeg to the mouth of the Saskatchewan River, up the Saskatchewan to Cumberland House, the oldest post of the Hudson's Bay Company in the interior, and by another maze of waterways over the height of land to the Churchill River and his district of the last two seasons. Thence the way ran up the Churchill to Ile à La Crosse, and from Ile à La Crosse northwesterly to Lake La Loche, the source of the Churchill.

Near La Loche began the longest and most famous of all the regular portages in the North-West; to reach Athabaska the height of land had to be crossed which separates the rivers flowing into Hudson Bay from those flowing into the Arctic Ocean. Portage La Loche, or Methye Portage, with its beauties and its perils, figures largely in the accounts of all who have visited that region. Its length is thirteen miles, and it ends in a steep precipice down which the canoes and their loads must be carried. From its highest point there opens an extensive view of the country to the north. Mackenzie is a

matter-of-fact writer, but the prospect from the summit moved him to unwonted eloquence. This is how he describes the scene:

From thence the eye looks down on the course of the little river.... beautifully meandering for upwards of thirty miles. The valley, which is at once refreshed and adorned by it, is about three miles in breadth, and is confined by two lofty ridges of equal height, displaying a most delightful mixture of wood and lawn, and stretching on till the blue mist obscures the prospect. Some parts of the inclining heights are covered with stately forests, relieved by promontories of the finest verdure, where the elk and buffalo find pasture. These are contrasted by spots where fire has destroyed the woods, and left a dreary void behind it.... From this elevated situation, I beheld my people, diminished, as it were, to half their size, employed in pitching their tents in a charming meadow, and among the canoes, which, being turned on their sides, presented their reddened bottoms in contrast with the surrounding verdure.

His heart may well have been uplifted by what he saw, for in the huge unknown country before him he was to achieve greatness, and he stood on the threshold of his kingdom. The immense river system, the waters of which he first beheld on that October day in 1787, was to be explored by him from

end to end within six years, and ever since it has been known by his name.

Yet his first experience of the Athabaska department was not fortunate. Delayed on the way up, his canoes were checked by ice before reaching Portage La Loche. Two he had to send back, and when the three others and their contents had been carried across the portage he found it impossible to proceed. Finally he was able to get away himself in a light canoe with eight men, but he had to make a cache of his equipment and to send the rest of his men back on foot. He had still two hundred miles to cover down the Clearwater and Athabaska Rivers before he reached the headquarters of the department, a fort which Pond had built, some years before, forty miles above Lake Athabaska. After eight days of dangerous travel through floating ice, he finally reached his destination.

During the winter he had apparently little trouble with Pond; they controlled the trade together, and parted on good terms when Pond left the country, never to return, in 1788. Pond had pushed his trading posts far to the north to Great Slave Lake, and to the west up the Peace River. At first Mackenzie thought of drawing in these posts, and adopting the policy of persuading the Indians to come to him, instead of sending to find them on their own grounds; this plan, however proved ineffective and was soon reversed. The winter of 1787-8 he spent in the ordinary routine of the fur-trader, varied by a journey to Ile à La Crosse to see his cousin, whom he eagerly tried to dissuade from carrying out his intention of leaving the North-West. From Pond he picked up much information about the geography of the

district, with its great river appearing from the west no one knew whence, and flowing to the north no one knew whither. Before the winter was over he had decided to try to solve its mysteries himself if he got the chance.

He went down with the furs in the summer of 1788 to Rainy Lake; the men of the Athabaska department went no further because their journey took so long that they could not go as far as Grand Portage and back in a single season. Here he persuaded his cousin to return with him to Athabaska, but only after revealing his plans of exploration, and representing that he should have to abandon them if Roderick would not take charge of the district during his absence. He also seems to have secured his partners' consent for the enterprise. He decided on his return to move his headquarters down stream from Pond's fort to Lake Athabaska itself. Roderick went forward to choose the site. He selected a point on the south shore, and there constructed Fort Chipewyan, soon to become the most famous post in the northern fur-trade. Roderick was determined that, if he had to live in monotonous exile two thousand miles from anywhere, he would not be deprived of some of the elementary adornments of life. He made the fort as comfortable as his primitive resources permitted, painted its interior, and founded a small library. For eight years it was Mackenzie's headquarters; and under his guidance the Athabaska district, remote as it was, came to be by far the most important of all the departments of the North West Company.

Of course if Mackenzie had been no more than a successful fur-trader, his name would be scarcely remembered; but his success as a trader is an essential part of

his life. Pond's character and example had demoralized the trade in the district. Moreover the Indians had been accustomed for many years to make each summer the long journey to Hudson Bay, in order to procure their supplies from the Hudson's Bay Company. Such a custom once formed was not easily broken, even though it meant five or six months of exhausting travel. The Hudson's Bay Company was able to offer goods at a lower price than the traders in the interior, as the cost of transport by canoe from Montreal to Chipewyan was very heavy. Mackenzie, by persuasion and by the establishment of posts at wisely chosen spots, gradually secured most of the trade in Athabaska for the North West Company. The heavily laden canoes of the Athabaska brigade proved each year his vigour and initiative, and as a partner he more than earned his share in the profits of the Company.

CHAPTER III

WHAT LIES BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS?

The life of a fur-trader may seem exciting and romantic in retrospect, but there is no doubt that it was in fact intolerably tedious to a man of education and ability. Mackenzie was certainly not the type to settle down tamely to a humdrum routine. His letters to his cousin are filled with complaints: "I begin to think it is the height of folly in a man to reside in a

country of this kind, deprived of every comfort that can render life agreeable"; and later: "I think it unpardonable for anybody to remain in this country who can leave it. What a pretty situation I am in this winter, starving and alone, without the power of doing myself or anybody else any good!" These sentiments could be matched from almost every fur-trader's journal that has been preserved.

The mode of living, indeed, was harder than that practised by any of the pioneers of to-day. When comforts must be carried by canoe from Montreal, it is no wonder that they were few. From Grand Portage to Fort Chipewyan was 1850 miles; the journey took two months, and there were nearly a hundred portages; goods for trade filled the canoes, together with food for the crews on the way. Indeed they were unable to take sufficient food for the whole journey, and had to depend in part on what they could secure en route; often the men arrived half-starved. The trader could not vary his diet with imported food; he had to depend on what the country would provide. It is a little hard to realize that Mackenzie and his men at Chipewyan lived for most of the year on fish and nothing else,—no bread, no vegetables, no sugar, but fish for every meal, and usually without even salt to season it. The only variety was provided by wild ducks and geese in spring and autumn, by occasional moose and other game, and by pemmican—dried buffalo meat, pounded and mixed with melted fat—which was kept as a reserve. Tobacco, and an occasional glass of liquor, were the sole luxuries. Even to maintain an adequate supply of fish needed great care. These were netted through the ice in the late autumn in great quantities, and kept frozen until required; each man's daily ration was eight pounds. When the fishery failed, many a

trader was worn by hunger before spring should open the rivers, and had to exist as best he could on old bones and leather. Death by starvation was not unknown.

The life was nearly as monotonous as the diet. The brief summer was the time of vigorous exertion, since it was wholly taken up with the journey to and from Rainy Lake. Worn out by incessant labour and harassed by millions of mosquitoes, the voyageur was usually not sorry when the ice formed. On the return from Rainy Lake the men were despatched to winter at various posts throughout the district, each post as a rule under the command of a clerk. The chief trader remained at Fort Chipewyan, where he controlled the traffic with such Indians as came to the fort, and superintended the fishery and the supply of fuel. The Indians came regularly to Chipewyan in the autumn, early in January, and at the end of March. At each visit they were outfitted on credit with ammunition and other supplies to be paid for in furs on their return. The currency was the beaver; everything was valued as being worth so many prime beaver skins. There was also a free distribution of liquor to the Indians, which was regularly followed by an orgy of drunkenness often ending in violence and murderous quarrels. In Mackenzie's time, however, one tribe which frequented Fort Chipewyan wisely refused to touch spirits.

The voyageurs were employed in transport, in fishing, and in other duties about the posts; they did little hunting. They were French Canadians, or half-breeds, and were almost all illiterate. Hardy, used to peril, and capable of amazing endurance, while on the move they could work at a pinch twenty hours a day for several days on end; their normal load

over a portage was two packs of ninety pounds weight for each man, but Mackenzie tells of one portage, over a mile long, across which men had been known to carry seven packs at a time, or 630 pounds, without a halt. Nearly all took temporary Indian wives while in the north, so that in time a considerable half-breed population grew up about the North West Company's posts. The seniors in the Company usually followed their men's example, for an Indian wife was almost a necessity to cook meals, to make moccasins and snowshoes, and to attend to other domestic duties. Mackenzie did as the rest: a half-breed son of his, described as an "amiable young man", died in 1809 in the Peace River country, and another (or possibly the same one) was baptized in Montreal in 1805.

The voyageurs were usually contented so long as they had plenty to eat and smoke. David Thompson wrote of them:

The fact is Jean Baptiste will not think, he is not paid for it; when he has a minute's respite he smokes his pipe, his constant companion, and all goes well; he will go through hardships, but requires a belly full, at least once a day, good tobacco to smoke, a warm blanket, and a kind master who will take his share of hard times and be the first in danger.

Credulous, superstitious, and careless of the morrow, they were easily discouraged if they lacked confidence in their

leader; but they could be persuaded to follow to the ends of the world a man whom they trusted, as Mackenzie was to show.

During the long winter months time dragged slowly for those who had been used to better things. The work of a post took up only a small part of the trader's day, except when traffic with the Indians was actually in progress. Books were valued possessions; the library at Chipewyan became famous throughout the North-West. Mackenzie did not pass his time in idleness. Attracted by geographical questions, he had trained himself to take observations of latitude and longitude, and had provided himself with a few instruments. As a fur-trader he was naturally interested in the discovery of new regions from which furs might be secured, but he was inspired by broader ideas than those of trade alone. His disposition was restless; he disliked submitting to authority, and he was set on having his own way. His friends found him hard to work with except by yielding to his will, and towards his enemies he was relentless. These masterful characteristics, which in later years led him first to reopen the old feuds in the fur-trade from Montreal and then to wage bitter warfare against the Hudson's Bay Company, helped to equip him as an explorer. His purpose defined, he set out to attain it with a vigour which swept opposition aside. His voyageurs might grumble, but they followed him; the Indians he treated with authority yet with understanding; both he made instruments of his will. His personality, however, was not grim or aloof; though he bore himself with dignity, yet, like a Highland chieftain, he practised generous hospitality, and on occasion he could be riotously jovial. He was a born

leader of men; if chance had set his feet on another path he might have become a great soldier.

This was the man who was confronted with one of the great unsolved geographical riddles of the world at a time when he happened to be in the best place from which to attempt a solution. He was one of that small band who are drawn towards the unknown, who are attracted by blank spaces on the map as the compass needle is attracted by the magnetic pole.

We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
Always a little further: it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea.

The riddle before him had occupied the minds of explorers and geographers since the days of Columbus. As time had passed and the boundaries of knowledge had widened, its solution had seemed to become less and less easy. Was there a practicable North-West Passage across North America from Europe to Asia? What lay between the farthest points reached in the interior by the fur-traders and the Pacific coast? What were the northern limits of the American continent? Generation after generation of explorers had sought the answer to these questions, first by sea and later by land as well. No one had succeeded, nor had any, indeed, come near to success; the outline of the sea-coast had been filled in on the Atlantic side, in Hudson Bay, and for part of the way up the Pacific shore; Hearne nearly twenty years before had reached the Arctic Ocean at the Coppermine River; but the Rockies had barred the way of travellers

across the prairies, and no white man had penetrated their defiles.

The British government was interested in securing an answer to the riddle. After the failure of many attempts to find the entrance to a North-West Passage from the Atlantic, Captain Cook had been despatched to see whether the problem was soluble from the Pacific side; and in 1778, a few months before he met his tragic end at the hands of the natives of Hawaii, he had discovered, far up the west coast, what he thought was the mouth of a great river. Later Captain Vancouver was sent out, in 1791, to follow up Cook's work. On more than one occasion the government had also tried to stir up the Hudson's Bay Company from its lethargy, to carry on that work of exploration which was a condition of its charter. Large political questions were involved; the sovereignty of the Pacific coast was claimed by both the Spanish and the Russians; and the maritime fur-trade, with the regal pelt of the sea-otter as its prize, was beginning to bring British vessels round Cape Horn to these remote waters. In 1768 Carleton, the governor of Canada, greatly under-estimating the difficulty of the task, had recommended the despatch of an expedition by land to the Pacific. In 1784 the North West Company had asked for a monopoly of the western trade in consideration of its intention to explore the whole western territory. After Mackenzie had set out on his first journey, the Hudson's Bay Company was urged in England to despatch a well-equipped party. Yet the riddle was solved and the journey made, not by an expedition fostered by the government or by a powerful company, but by the effort of one man acting in isolation. Never in the

annals of exploration have greater results been achieved through the determination and courage of a single individual.

The task which Mackenzie set himself was to reach the Pacific. His own account, in the preface to his *Voyages*, of his motives and qualifications is worth quotation:

I was led, at an early period of life, by commercial views, to the country North-West of Lake Superior, in North America, and being endowed by Nature with an inquisitive mind and enterprising spirit; possessing also a constitution and frame of body equal to the most arduous undertakings, and being familiar with toilsome exertions in the prosecution of mercantile pursuits, I not only contemplated the practicability of penetrating across the continent of America, but was confident in the qualifications, as I was animated by the desire, to undertake the enterprise.

It was undoubtedly Peter Pond who determined the course of Mackenzie's first attempt. Pond was better informed than any other man about the geography of the Athabaska district, but he was not a trained explorer, and he often drew on his ample imagination in depicting territories which he had never visited. The great river of the Athabaska district is known by three names: from the Rocky Mountains to near Lake Athabaska (it does not actually pass through the lake) it

is called the Peace; from Lake Athabaska to Great Slave Lake it is called the Slave; and thence to its mouth in the Arctic Ocean it is called the Mackenzie. Pond seems to have known its course from some distance up the Peace down as far as Great Slave Lake; for the rest he relied on his own conjectures and on Indian reports. His theory (or one of his theories) was that Great Slave Lake drained into the Pacific; he even described to an acquaintance in Quebec the nature of the river in detail: "From out of the Great Slave Lake runs a very large river, which runs almost south-west, and has the largest falls on it in the known world; it is at least two miles wide where the falls are, and an amazing body of water." He (or rather his acquaintance, for the quotation is from a letter reporting a conversation with Pond in 1789) goes on to say that this river flows round the north end of the Rockies to the Pacific, and is identical with the great river Cook had discovered in 1778. Further: "Another man by the name of McKenzie was left by Pond at Slave Lake with orders to go down the River, and from thence to Unalaska, and so to Kamskatsha, and thence to England through Russia, etc. If he meets with no accident, you may have him with you next year."

Pond was a braggart and a liar. His account of the river is entirely imaginary. Mackenzie certainly took no orders from Pond, and had no such extended design as is here ascribed to him. He was far better equipped than Pond as an explorer, and he was probably able, before he set out, to correct some of Pond's more flagrant errors. But Pond and Mackenzie had spent the winter of 1787-8 together in Athabaska; during that winter Mackenzie's ambitions as an explorer appear to have begun; and he undoubtedly started downstream in 1789 in

the hope and belief that he should reach the Pacific in accordance with Pond's theory. In one passage he writes: "It was in the summer of 1789 that I went this expedition in hopes of getting into Cook's River"; in another: "I followed the course of the waters which had been reported by Mr. Pond to fall into Cook's River." It was a bitter disappointment when he found that his route had taken him instead to the ice-bound coast of the Arctic Ocean. Pond must, therefore, be given some credit as the inspirer of a famous journey. Though he misled Mackenzie as to the result, he gave him a definite question to answer: Into what ocean drained the rivers and lakes of the Athabaska region? Were they, as Pond believed, the upper waters of Cook's River on the Pacific? The only way to find out was to go and see.

CHAPTER IV

THE VOYAGE TO THE ARCTIC

"June 3, 1789. We embarked at nine o'clock in the morning, at Fort Chipewyan ... in a canoe made of birch bark. The crew consisted of four Canadians, two of whom were attended by their wives, and a German; we were accompanied also by an Indian, who had acquired the title of English Chief, and his two wives, in a small canoe, with two young Indians; his followers in another small canoe." So

opens Mackenzie's account of his first attempt to reach the Pacific. Before he started he had sent Roderick McKenzie in his place to Grand Portage, with his report to the Company on the winter's trade and his estimate of supplies for the coming season. He tells little of the equipment of the expedition, but few exploring parties can have set out more lightly burdened. For food they carried some bags of pemmican and some corn (this must have been brought from beyond Grand Portage, as none was then grown in the North-West); these, however, were to be used only as emergency rations, and they relied normally on the fish and game which they secured on the way. There were also a bale or two of trade-goods, for use as presents "to ensure us a friendly reception among the Indians," arms and ammunition, tents, fish-nets, and spare clothing. The canoe, fitted with mast and sail, was probably larger than those in ordinary use in the interior, as it carried eight people and their belongings. Another canoe, in charge of Leroux, a clerk of the Company, went with them on a trading mission as far as Great Slave Lake, and carried a part of their supplies.

Mackenzie's party was carefully chosen. His five voyageurs were men of sterling worth whose endurance was tried to the utmost without complaint. The Indian wives of two of them helped to work the canoe, made the foot-gear for the party, and were useful in camp. The English Chief had been "one of the followers of the chief who conducted Mr. Hearne to the Coppermine River" seventeen years before, and therefore had some knowledge of the country to the far north; his name had been given him because he had led his countrymen in carrying their furs from the Athabaska region to the English of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort

Churchill. He seems to have possessed a greater constancy and devotion in trying circumstances than most Indians would have shown, though on the return trip Mackenzie discovered evidence that he had been deliberately deceived by this man, and on one occasion they quarrelled bitterly. He and the Chipewyans of his tribe who went with him were to serve both as interpreters and as hunters; some of them were almost always away from the main party in search of game, bringing the proceeds of the hunt to the camp each night. It was with these Indians that Mackenzie had most trouble. Their presence was absolutely necessary to provide food for the expedition and to secure contact with the natives; but they were too ready to believe the terrible tales which they heard of monster rapids, ogres, and the like, they often wished to turn back, and more than once they nearly got the party into serious trouble because they "were ever ready to take what they could from the natives, without making them any return." The inclusion of Indian women in the party may cause some surprise; but there was no chivalry among these northern tribes, and it was the women's business on a journey to do most of the work, leaving the men to hunt and take their ease.

On leaving Fort Chipewyan the little flotilla steered to the west end of Lake Athabaska, where a short river connects the lake with the Peace River. As Mackenzie noted, when the Peace is high it flows down this stream into Lake Athabaska; when it is normal or low the current is in the opposite direction. The Slave River begins at the junction between the Peace and this stream; the party reached it on the second day and turned north towards Great Slave Lake. This part of the journey was through waters already well known; Hearne had

been at Great Slave Lake in the winter of 1772, and had gone some miles up the Slave River on the ice; Leroux, Mackenzie's companion, had traded at Great Slave Lake on Pond's orders in 1786, and since then had passed up and down the Slave River several times.

On June 4 the drastic routine of travelling on which Mackenzie insisted was begun. The regular hour of starting each day on which movement was possible was between 2.30 and 5 in the morning, and camp was rarely made before 6 at night, often not until 8. On the second day of the journey they started at 4 and made camp at 7.30, after covering seventy miles; this was an unusually long day's run, though later on distances of 79 and 72 miles were covered. On June 5 they reached the series of rapids, fourteen miles long, which make necessary the only portages between Chipewyan and the Arctic Ocean. To-day these rapids are avoided by a single portage over a road from Fort Fitzgerald to Fort Smith, and motors and waggons make transport easy. In Mackenzie's time there were six separate portages, totalling about two and a half miles, some of them very rough. In the rapid at Pelican Portage one of the Indian canoes was lost; the woman who was its sole occupant barely escaped. The last portage bore the melancholy name of Portage des Noyés, so common on all the highways of the fur-trade, in memory of the drowning of five voyageurs in 1786. In spite of the gruelling work at the portages, thirty miles were made that day. It took the party nearly four days more to reach Great Slave Lake, because violent wind and rain delayed them for a day and a half. The total length of Slave River is about three hundred miles, and Mackenzie reached its mouth on the morning of the seventh day, June 9.

Great Slave Lake, fifth in size of all the lakes in America, is still a terror to the navigators of the north. Mackenzie found it covered with ice, and the weather became cold enough to end for a time the plague of mosquitoes. He steered inside some islands along a narrow ice-free channel to a spot, a few miles to the east of the river's mouth, where Leroux had built some huts in 1786, now the site of Fort Resolution. Here he was forced to wait five days for the ice to move. He kept his men busy hunting and fishing, while the women gathered berries, so that their stores might be preserved intact. On June 14 heavy rain helped to break up the ice, and the next day the party moved a few miles out into the lake to a small island. For eight days more they went as they could, from island to island, a few miles at a time, towards the north shore of the lake, checked continually by ice and wind. On the 19th Mackenzie notes: "We were pestered by musquitoes, though in a great measure surrounded by ice." On the 21st seven caribou, marooned on an island, were easily killed. Mackenzie sat up all night to watch the sun, which was below the horizon for only four hours and a quarter; during the night ice an eighth of an inch thick formed on the lake. On the 22nd two bags of pemmican were concealed on an island for use on the return trip. At last on the 23rd the party reached the northern mainland at an Indian village some way up the long North Arm of the lake. Here a day was spent in opening trade with the Red-Knife Indians, a new canoe was purchased, and a guide secured. Leroux was left behind to continue the trade and to build a fort if he found it worth while.

"We left this place at three this morning, our canoe being deeply laden, as we had embarked some packages that had

come in the canoes of M. Leroux. We were saluted on our departure with some volleys of small arms, which we returned." The limits of previous journeys had now been passed, and they were facing the unknown; Pond's conjectures and Indian reports were all Mackenzie had to guide him, and from these he knew that the exit from the lake was at its western end. For four arduous days they coasted along the dangerous north shore, menaced by floating ice and by high winds which rapidly raise a heavy sea in the broad waters of the western part of the lake. The guide proved useless and led them out of their way; his conduct so enraged the English Chief that he threatened to kill him. At last, on rounding a point on the morning of June 29, they found themselves in the wide and shallow entrance of the great river for which they had been searching. Driven on by a stiff breeze, before night they had left Great Slave Lake far behind them, and they made their camp somewhere beyond the present site of Fort Providence.

For some days Mackenzie's hopes must have been high that he was indeed on the way to the Pacific, for the broad river on which he was the first white man to venture flows almost due west for three hundred miles after leaving Great Slave Lake, with a steady and even current ideal for rapid progress by canoe. At first wide and filled with islands, it soon contracts to an average breadth of about one mile all the way to its mouth. Progress now was easy and rapid. After skirting the Horn Mountains on the north shore, they passed on July 1 the mouth of what Mackenzie calls the River of the Mountain, the greatest tributary of the Mackenzie, now known as the Liard. Two more bags of pemmican were cached on an island in the river. On July 2 the Rocky

Mountains, of which they had caught a distant glimpse the day before, came into full view. They were still patched with snow. On the same day "the Indians complained of the perseverance with which we pushed forward, and that they were not accustomed to such severe fatigue as it occasioned"—and no wonder; but Mackenzie did not heed their complaints.

When the river reaches the Rockies its course changes abruptly to the north, and it flows for several hundred miles between ranges of hills on either bank. Mackenzie was very anxious to meet the Indians native to the district in order to get information. He was in hourly fear of reaching great falls or rapids; the current was so strong that it "produced a hissing noise like a kettle of water in a moderate state of boiling." On the evening of July 3 he climbed a prominent hill, the Rock by the River Side of later travellers, and found a deserted Indian camp. The weather had turned cold, and ice formed at night in quiet water. On the 5th he at last succeeded in meeting some Indians; they were greatly frightened, and it needed much diplomacy from the English Chief to persuade them to approach. "We made them smoke, though it was evident they did not know the use of tobacco; we likewise supplied them with grog; but I am disposed to think that they accepted our civilities rather from fear than inclination." Presents of knives, beads, and the like were received with a more genuine appreciation. The "information" they gave Mackenzie was that the distance to the sea was so great "that old age would come upon us before the period of our return," that the country was peopled with monsters, and that the river was blocked by two impassable falls. The land, indeed, was desolate and awe-inspiring, the

climate brutal, the river often treacherous and at certain seasons savage, the life a struggle against starvation; it is no wonder that the Indians peopled their country with malignant spirits and magnified its dangers.

Mackenzie was not discouraged by these fables, for he had learned to discount the imaginative power of the natives, and to discover the germ of truth beneath the mountain of lies. His Indian followers, however, were much frightened and urged an immediate return. His account of the natives is far from flattering: "They are a meagre, ugly, ill-made people, particularly about the legs, which are clumsy and covered with scabs.... They are of a moderate stature, and as far as could be discovered through the coat of dirt and grease that covers them, are of a fairer complexion than the generality of Indians who are the natives of warmer climates." He adds detailed observations on dress, dances, huts, decorations, weapons, and canoes. One Indian was reluctantly persuaded to accompany them as guide, and before nightfall they had passed the mouth of Great Bear River, which carries to the Mackenzie the clear green waters of Great Bear Lake, the largest of all the northern lakes.

On July 6 Mackenzie tried to climb another hill to get a view of the country, but before he was half way up he was "almost suffocated by clouds of musquitoes, and obliged to return." The insect pests grew, if anything, more trying the further north they went, whenever the weather was at all warm. He saw, however, that beyond this point the river ran away from the mountains through a dreary plain. Early the next day they reached the impassable rapid of Indian report; it proved not in the least formidable, and to-day it is passed

without difficulty by river steamers except when the water is low. Below the rapid they met more Indians who told them of another great cataract just in front of them; actually the party went beyond it without noticing it. These Indians also produced a new bogey to frighten the strangers in the Eskimos, "a very wicked and malignant people, who would put us all to death." On the 7th also they passed through the Ramparts, the chief scenic feature of the northern Mackenzie, where the majestic, mile-broad stream narrows to a width of three or four hundred yards and runs for some miles between high cliffs. On the 8th they exchanged their panicky guide for a new one, but he deserted the same night in a thunder-storm, and another had to be taken by force and watched like a prisoner.

By July 9 Mackenzie was drawing near the end of his search. A new tribe of Indians told him that those he had met upstream were "no better than old women, and abominable liars, which," he adds, "coincided with the notion we already entertained of them." These were much less unattractive in appearance, and gave Mackenzie encouraging information. The sea, they said, was only ten days' journey distant, and they showed him pieces of iron and bows which they had obtained from the Eskimos of the coast. On the 10th he passed a bend in the river with high cliffs, now known as the Lower Ramparts, and the Rocky Mountains, covered with snow, came into sight once more. Soon after, the party reached a place where "the river widens, and runs through various channels formed by islands"—the beginning of the large delta at the mouth of the river. After some discussion as to the proper channel to take, Mackenzie, against the advice of his latest guide borrowed from the last tribe, selected the

middle one because it was the largest. He secured that day an observation for latitude which showed him that he was further north than he had expected; and in consequence he came at last to the definite conclusion that the ocean at the river's mouth was the Arctic and not the Pacific, and that he was therefore destined to fail in the main object of his journey.

They camped that night on an island in the delta, and the Indians renewed their protests against going further. Indeed, with every day's progress to the north it became less likely that they would be able to return to Chipewyan before winter began. Mackenzie was resolved to push on, but the shortage of food together with the complaints of the English Chief led him to promise that he would limit his further journey to seven days. That evening he sat up to watch the sun, which shone all night. Next day they reached some deserted Eskimo huts, and examined them and their contents with interest; no Eskimos, however, were seen here or elsewhere, though they found fresh foot-prints more than once. The islands of the delta through which they were paddling were "so naked that scarce a shrub was to be seen", the ground was solidly frozen four inches beneath the surface, and yet it was covered with grass and flowers.

On July 12 they reached what Mackenzie calls "the entrance of the lake", and what was in fact the Arctic Ocean. They made for "a high island" through very shallow water; and Mackenzie and the English Chief climbed to its summit. All round in front of them they saw solid ice, blocking further progress, and to the south-west the Rocky Mountains were dimly visible. His voyageurs proved their bravery: "My

people could not, at this time, refrain from expressions of real concern, that they were obliged to return without reaching the sea.... Even in our present situation they declared their readiness to follow me wherever I should be pleased to lead them." The travellers' first impression was that a lake lay in front of them, the ice on which prevented their attaining their goal at the ocean beyond. But evidence soon accumulated that they were on the shore of the ocean itself. That night the tide rose so that the baggage had to be carried up the shore; in the morning a fish was found in their net which the English Chief recognized as of a sort common in Hudson Bay. They spent the next day on the same spot watching the ice and trying to eke out their food by fishing.

On the morning of the 14th Mackenzie was awakened with the news that some large animals were visible in the water. These he identified as a species of white whale. "Having ordered the canoe to be prepared, we embarked in pursuit of them. It was, indeed, a very wild and unreflecting enterprise, and it was a very fortunate circumstance that we failed in our attempt to overtake them, as a stroke from the tail of one of these enormous fish would have dashed the canoe to pieces." They put out at noon to try to get a closer view of the ice barrier to the north, but a sudden wind almost swamped the canoe, and they regained the island only with the greatest difficulty. Mackenzie seems to have realized that they had reached the limit of their voyage, for he had a post erected on the island—still known as Whale Island—"on which I engraved the latitude of the place, my own name, the number of persons which I had with me, and the time we remained there." On that same day, July 14, 1789, in far-off Paris an

angry mob sacked the ancient prison-fortress of the Bastille and began the great French Revolution.

They remained one more day on Whale Island, and once more the tide wetted their baggage. Mackenzie was very anxious to meet some Eskimos so as to learn more of the country. His guide told him that one of their favourite haunts was the mouth of a small river flowing into the east side of the delta. "We accordingly made for the river, and stemmed the current." This is the only indication Mackenzie gives that he had turned upstream and that the voyage of discovery was over. It has, indeed, been debated whether Mackenzie was aware at the time that he had reached the ocean. There is no definite statement in his journal, but a careful study of it seems to show that he knew where he was. One must remember that he was disappointed in any case, for it was the wrong ocean that he reached; naturally, when the Pacific was his goal, he expresses no delight on reaching the Arctic. He was not able to advance the simplest of all proofs—the saltness of the water; for so great is the volume of the Mackenzie River that the water remains fresh for many miles beyond its mouth. Sir John Franklin examined the coast thirty-five years later, and he doubted whether Mackenzie could have reached salt water in a canoe even without any ice to stop him. He pays tribute to Mackenzie's bravery in venturing as far from shore as he did in so fragile a vessel, and commends the accuracy of his observations: "The survey of the Mackenzie made on this Expedition differs very little in its outline from that of its discoverer, whose general correctness we had often occasion to admire"—a notable compliment from the professional explorer to the intrepid fur-trader. It was long before Mackenzie was given full credit

for his discoveries, but there remains to-day, of course, not the shadow of a doubt that to him belongs the full honour of discovering the great river which bears his name, and of traversing it from beginning to end through a thousand miles of unknown country between Great Slave Lake and the Arctic Ocean.

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN AND A FRESH START

The hardest part of the journey had still to be endured. The party was about fifteen hundred miles from Fort Chipewyan, and it was upstream all the way back. They had taken fourteen days to descend the river from Great Slave Lake; thirty-eight days of the hardest labour were to pass before they saw the Lake once more. They lingered for a short time in the delta, travelling among the islands in a fruitless search for Eskimos. The fishing was poor, their pemmican had become mouldy, and game was scarce. On leaving the delta the supply of game improved; Mackenzie notes on July 23: "We had not touched any of our provision stores for six days, in which time we had consumed two reindeer, four swans, forty-five geese, and a considerable quantity of fish; but it is to be considered that we were ten men and four women. I have always observed that the north men possessed very hearty appetites, but they were very much exceeded by those

with me since we entered this river. I should really have thought it absolute gluttony in my people, if my own appetite had not increased in a similar proportion."

The current was strong, and for most of the way they found it necessary to tow the canoe by a line from the shore, a procedure so wearing that the women "were continually employed in making shoes of moose-skin for the men, as a pair did not last more than a day." The water in the river was lower than it had been on their descent, and this increased the speed of the current. The uncertainty of the weather added to their discomfort: there were violent changes of temperature; on two occasions storms threw down their tents; and once it blew so violently that "we were obliged to throw ourselves flat on the ground to escape being wounded by the stones that were hurled in the air like sand." Altogether they must have been delighted when they reached the entrance to Great Slave Lake on August 22.

Their slow progress had one advantage: Mackenzie was able to observe the banks of the river carefully. On July 24 he found "pieces of *Petroleum*, which bears a resemblance to yellow wax"; oil was discovered a few years ago not far from this spot. On August 1 he notes that the night was dark enough for stars to be visible for the first time since they had left Chipewyan. On August 2, near the mouth of Great Bear River, he noticed some smoke and went to it in hope of finding Indians; he discovered instead that "the whole bank was on fire for a very considerable distance"—it was a seam of low-grade coal which is still burning, nearly a century and a half later. On August 10 he made a determined attempt to climb one of the ridges of the Rockies, but after scrambling

through undergrowth for hours he was stopped by a marsh in which he sank to his armpits, and was forced to return.

All the way up he took every chance of learning about the country from the natives. In the lower reaches of the river they met many Indians whom they had not seen on the way down, but higher, though they saw many signs of habitation, the Indians either deliberately avoided them or were away hunting. Mackenzie picked up some tantalizing information. One Indian told that the Eskimos had reported meeting "large canoes full of white men to the westward, eight or ten winters ago, from whom they obtained iron in exchange for leather"—probably a party of Russians from Alaska. A second described "another river on the other side of the mountains to the south-west, which falls into the *Belhoullay Toe* or White Man's Lake [i.e., the ocean], in comparison of which that on whose banks we then were was but a small stream," giving such interesting details as that the natives of this river could kill common men with their eyes. A third added that this new river ran towards the mid-day sun, drew a map of it for Mackenzie on the sand, and said that he had heard there was a white man's fort near its mouth. This river was probably the Yukon, but Mackenzie conceived it to be the Cook's River of which he was in search. Such was his zeal that he was ready, on the strength of these vague rumours and with the season far advanced, to set out on a new expedition by land: "I made an advantageous proposition to this man to accompany me across the mountains to the other river, but he refused it." A fourth group of informants later confirmed the account of the river with much adornment; the inhabitants had wings, fed on enormous birds, and so on.

During this stage of the journey Mackenzie had difficulties with his Indian companions. More than once they nearly caused trouble by stealing from the natives. Moreover they had lost heart, and were much afraid that their undaunted leader would attempt some new discovery before returning to Chipewyan. Mackenzie suspected that they were concealing information in translating to him what they learned from the natives. On August 13 he had a downright quarrel with the English Chief: "I stated to him that I had come a great way, and at a very considerable expense, without having completed the object of my wishes, and that I suspected he had concealed from me a principal part of what the natives had told him respecting the country, lest he should be obliged to follow me." The English Chief indignantly denied the accusation, and burst into tears; Mackenzie soothed him by the application of "liquid consolation", and friendly relations were restored. But he had to give up the thought of an overland expedition for that year.

On August 24 they rejoined Leroux on Great Slave Lake, and went with him to the house which he had built on the North Arm, where he was to spend the winter. Here Mackenzie parted from the English Chief, whom he sent to encourage the fur-trade among the Beaver Indians. The passage across the lake was accompanied by a good deal of risk from wind and sea, and took several days. On September 3 they entered the Slave River; on the 9th they passed the portages; and on the 12th they reached Fort Chipewyan in safety, after a journey of about three thousand miles accomplished in one hundred and two days without loss of life or any serious accident. The trip was one of the most rapid in the history of exploration: the outward voyage took

forty days, an average of thirty-seven miles a day; three days were spent on the shores of the Arctic; and the return consumed fifty-nine days, an average of twenty-six miles a day.

What had Mackenzie accomplished? His own view was that the chief result was negative: he had demonstrated that the famous North-West Passage did not exist. His expedition, he wrote, "proved without a doubt that there is not a North-West Passage below this latitude [Whale Island], and I believe it will be generally allowed that no passage is practicable in a higher latitude, the sea being eternally covered with ice"—a correct conclusion. Further, he had shown that there was no easy route to the Pacific such as Pond had imagined. He had, indeed, failed in his object, and his first name for the river which he had discovered was River Disappointment. But if the journey was a failure from his point of view, it was a most productive failure. He had solved the mystery of the drainage of the Athabaska region. He had discovered one of the great rivers of the world, from source to mouth the longest in North America after the Mississippi. He had proved that it was possible to live on the country while travelling rapidly, even in the most barren of the inhabited regions of the earth. He had trained himself as an explorer, and had demonstrated his ability as a leader. Furthermore, his failure to reach the Pacific by the Mackenzie River had created in him a stern resolve that go there he should by another route. A great fur-trader he continued to be, but he was now, until the fulfilment of his desire, an explorer above all.

Mackenzie spent the winter of 1789-90 at Fort Chipewyan with his cousin; it was a good season for furs, and the returns were admirable. In the spring he went to Grand Portage to attend an important meeting of the partners of the Company, at which a new agreement was reached to last until the end of 1798. After this reorganization there were ten partners, holding among them twenty shares; Mackenzie held two shares. The leading figure in the Company was Simon McTavish, the principal agent in Montreal, whose firm owned no fewer than six shares. He and Mackenzie were both proud Highlanders, domineering in character and sure of their own judgment, and they seem from the first to have been very ready to disagree. Mackenzie on his way down writes to Roderick of "a very severe letter from Mr. McTavish" complaining of the condition of the furs sent from Athabaska in 1789. At Grand Portage he found "my expedition was hardly spoken of, but that is what I expected." McTavish was not interested in exploration for its own sake, and, as a founder of the original North West Company, he seems to have been jealous of those who had served with the New Company.

Mackenzie was back at Chipewyan for the season of 1790-91, and he sent Roderick to Great Slave Lake to winter on the north shore so as to develop the trade with the Indians encountered on the journey of 1789. In 1791 his turn came to leave the North-West and enjoy for a season, after six years' abstinence, the pleasures of a civilized life. While descending the Churchill River on his way to Grand Portage he met a party sent by the Hudson's Bay Company, at the instigation of the British government, to explore the interior and make an accurate survey. The party was in charge of

Philip Turner, the skilled surveyor who taught the art of surveying to David Thompson; they were on their way to Lake Athabaska, and Mackenzie wrote instructing his cousin, left as usual in charge at Chipewyan, to house them in the fort for the winter and give them every assistance. Though every year the rivalry between the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies was increasing, Mackenzie did not permit commercial jealousy to hinder the progress of knowledge.

The way in which he spent his leave was characteristic. After the Grand Portage meeting of 1791 he went to Montreal and thence to England. To reach the Pacific was the supreme object of his life, and he felt that to ensure success he needed to improve both his knowledge and his equipment. He writes in the preface to his *Voyages* about his journey to the Arctic: "In this voyage I was not only without the necessary books and instruments, but also felt myself deficient in the sciences of astronomy and navigation. I did not hesitate, therefore, to undertake a winter's voyage in order to procure the one and acquire the other."

If his new expedition was to be of real value he had to be able to plot his course and fix his position on the map with the greatest possible accuracy. The determination of latitude was fairly easy, but longitude had been the bugbear of explorers for centuries. The longitude of a place was found by comparing local time at the point of observation with Greenwich time; from the difference of times the distance east or west of Greenwich could be easily calculated. Local time was ascertained fairly simply by observing the sun or the stars. The difficulty was to discover exactly, while in some remote region, what the time was at Greenwich. Before

the era of cable and wireless it was by no means an easy matter, and the British Government had offered in 1714 a prize of no less than £20,000 for a solution of the problem. Even the most accurate time-piece could not be trusted without frequent correction, and for this there was usually no opportunity. In consequence the explorer in distant lands had to fall back on what were called "absolute" methods; these involved first the observation of certain astronomical phenomena, generally the moon or the satellites of Jupiter, and then the calculation of Greenwich time from these observations with the aid of an almanack, by a process which varied in difficulty in accordance with the method employed.

Mackenzie, therefore, crossed the ocean primarily to train himself to take accurate observations of longitude. He was apparently ashamed of his results on the first voyage, though he need not have been in view of Franklin's praise, already quoted. He wrote to Lord Dorchester some years later: "Not having been furnished with proper instruments to ascertain the longitude on my first expedition, I made myself but little known during my residence in London the winter of 1791-2." This appears to be the reason why, in an age much interested in geographical discovery, the presence in London of a man who had just made a great addition to knowledge passed unnoticed. His time was not wasted; though in 1789 he was well equipped for an amateur, he lacked the professional finish which he now acquired. He left England in April, 1792, was at Grand Portage in July, and had joined Roderick McKenzie at Chipewyan before the end of September. At Grand Portage he apparently revealed to his partners his plans for a new journey, for McDonald of Garth, at that time a young clerk in the Company's service, tells in his

autobiography that Mackenzie then offered to take him to the Pacific, an offer which he refused.

Some time before, Mackenzie had decided the direction of his second attempt. He had discovered in 1789 that the Rocky Mountains were a continuous chain to the Arctic Ocean, and he could not hope, therefore, to find anywhere an easy passage downstream to the Pacific until he had crossed the Rockies. His problem now was to get to the Rockies, to find a way through them along which it was possible to convey a canoe, to discover a river on the other side of the watershed, and to follow it to its mouth. He had learned in London whatever was to be found out there about the Pacific coast. He knew from the observations taken by himself and Turner, compared with those of navigators on the Pacific, roughly the total distance to be covered from Chipewyan—eight or nine hundred miles in a straight line; but of course this distance would probably be doubled in finding a possible route. How was he to start? He had demonstrated that nothing was to be gained by going downstream from Lake Athabaska. Why not start upstream by the Peace River? It was a large river which promised to be easily navigable for a long distance; it flowed from the Rocky Mountains in about the right direction; and the lower part of its course had already proved a rich region for furs. If he traced it to its source, might he not find that it took him near the object of his search, a river flowing to the west and the Pacific?

Time would be precious if he was to get to the ocean and back in a single season. He therefore decided to go up the Peace River as far as he could in the autumn of 1792, to spend the winter there, and to continue in the spring as soon

as the ice went out. Remaining only a few days at Chipewyan, he left the fort on October 10, and made his way by the 13th to Peace Point on Peace River, where the Crees and the Beaver Indians had settled their differences and given the river its name. Since his arrival in Athabaska trade had been opened for some distance up the Peace, and the course of the river had been already surveyed as far as the first post upstream, which, though only four years old, had already earned the name of the Old Establishment. His detailed observations begin from this place. On the 20th, at a new post under a trader named Finlay, Mackenzie met for the first time some Indians of the Peace River region. They had gathered to secure their outfits for the winter's hunt, forty-two hunters and their families, and they were "animated with the prospect of again indulging themselves in the luxury of rum, of which they had been deprived since the beginning of May." He satisfied their desires to the extent of a nine-gallon cask.

A sharp frost reminded him that he could not linger, and he continued upstream on 23rd. He had selected a spot near the junction of the Smoky River with the Peace for his winter quarters, close to the site of the town of Peace River to-day. Here, on November 1, his party arrived after a hard struggle and in very cold weather. Two men had been sent ahead in the spring to prepare timber for the buildings, and they were found to have done their work "with activity and skill." The despatch of this advance party before he had returned from England seems to show that Mackenzie's plans had been made when he went on leave in 1791. Seventy Indians were waiting for him, to open trade and to receive the usual presents; their concerns occupied his first week. Then he

busied himself with supervising the building of the fort. His dwelling was ready for occupation on December 23, when his men began work on their own houses. He comments on their life as follows:

The men who were now with me left this place in the beginning of last May, and went to the Rainy Lake in canoes laden with packs of fur, which from the immense length of the voyage and other concurring circumstances is a most severe trial of patience and perseverance. There they do not remain a sufficient time for ordinary repose, when they take a load of goods in exchange and proceed on their return, in a great measure, day and night. They had been arrived near two months, and all that time had been continually engaged in very toilsome labour, with nothing more than a common shed to protect them from the frost and snow. Such is the life which these people lead; and is continued with unremitting exertion till their strength is lost in premature old age.

The new year was greeted with volleys of musketry, and a special ration of rum and cakes. Mackenzie had to act the doctor to the local Indians, and he seems to have been surprised at the success of his treatments with improvised medicines. He fills the pages of his journal with reports of the weather, such information as he was able to pick up about the country, and observations on the habits of its people. He

twice notes the arrival of that strange warm wind known as a Chinook, which licked up all the snow from the ground and covered the ice on the river with water. His remarks on the treatment of the Indian women are interesting: "It is not uncommon, while the men carry nothing but a gun that their wives and daughters follow with such weighty burdens that if they lay them down they cannot replace them, and that is a kindness which the men will not deign to perform; so that during their journeys they are frequently obliged to lean against a tree for a small portion of temporary relief." Once he records with pleasure that, while walking through the woods on a very cold day, he was cheered by the lusty singing of a flock of birds, which seem from his description to have been White-winged Crossbills.

On April 20 "we were visited by our summer companions the gnats and mosquitoes", and spring came with a rush. The ice went out of the river, and on May 8 six canoes were sent down to Fort Chipewyan laden with furs and provisions; the trade must have been good, for two canoes had contained the party and its supplies on the way in. The Company's business was settled, his companions were chosen, and his canoe was constructed: "Her dimensions were twenty-five feet long within, exclusive of the curves of stem and stern, twenty-six inches hold, and four feet nine inches beam. At the same time she was so light that two men could carry her on a good road three or four miles without resting. In this slender vessel we shipped provisions, goods for presents, arms, ammunition, and baggage to the weight of three thousand pounds, and an equipage of ten people." The ten were as follows: Mackenzie in command; Alexander Mackay, another Highlander and a clerk in the Company's service,

second in command; six French voyageurs, two of whom had been with Mackenzie to the Arctic; and two Indians as interpreters and hunters. Mackenzie's dog should also be included in the list. Mackay, a vigorous and able man, later became a partner in the Company, and then left it to join John Jacob Astor in the Pacific Fur Company; he lost his life in the *Tonquin* massacre in 1811 on the Pacific coast. Mackenzie had found it impossible to secure satisfactory Indian companions. Once his arrangements were upset by the murder of a rival by a jealous husband; at last three volunteers were secured, but the only one who knew anything of the country to the west ran away two days before Mackenzie started. Of the two he took, one was notoriously lazy (his nick-name was the Crab), while both "know no more of the country than I do myself."

A long letter to his cousin, written on the eve of his departure, shows an anxiety of mind which is banished from the pages of his published journal. He records that he has been "so vexed and disturbed of late that I cannot sit down to anything steadily"; he is worried about his interests in the Company, in his absence from the meeting that year at Grand Portage; and he announces his resolution to leave the North-West in 1794. "Should I be successful," he writes, "I shall return with great advantage; if not, I cannot be worse off than I am at present." He had been busy with his instruments, and he reports the latitude and longitude of his wintering place. He adds an interesting comment: "I send you a couple of guineas, the rest I take with me to traffic with the Russians." Whatever his doubts, he concealed them from his companions; and the party paddled bravely up the river on the afternoon of May 9 to begin their great adventure.

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT JOURNEY

(1) *To the Forks of the Peace River*

Mackenzie's first objective was a fork of the Peace River, of which he had heard from an old Indian who had been on a war-party through the mountains. He was informed that he should find, if he went up the southern branch, "a carrying-place of about a day's march for a young man" to a river flowing to the west. To reach the fork he had to go upstream for nearly two hundred and fifty miles. The Peace River was unknown to white men above his wintering place, and during this part of its course it actually breaks through the main chain of the Rockies by Peace River Pass. He had heard the usual Indian tales of impassable rapids, huge waterfalls, and enormous cliffs, and he had, as usual, discounted the stories; but he was to find that he had been told little more than the truth. The most arduous days on the Arctic voyage were easy compared with the toil and danger which his party was called on to endure at the very outset of this expedition. Without a leader of so fine a determination and so inspiring a confidence they would have returned, beaten and hopeless, within a fortnight.

Their first trouble was that the canoe was so heavily laden that it began to leak even in calm water, and they frequently had to stop to repair it with spruce gum. Their course lay nearly due west, through beautiful and fertile country crowded with game; their supply of food gave them no anxiety, for they could shoot as many buffalo, moose, bear, and beaver as they wanted. On May 11 they met some Beaver Indians on a hunting party, and Mackenzie was very anxious lest they should persuade his two hunters to desert; tact with the chief and a present of tobacco averted the danger. The river ran now between cliffs only two or three hundred yards apart, now between low banks in a broad channel dotted with islands. With each day's progress the current grew more rapid. On the 17th the snow-covered line of the Rocky Mountains appeared in view; on the day before they had seen "two grisly and hideous bears"—their first encounter with grizzlies.

On the 19th they reached a point above which the Indians had said that they never attempted to go by canoe, making a long portage instead. Mackenzie decided, however, to stick to the river as long as he could. They were at the foot of Peace River Canyon, where the stream cuts a tumultuous path between steep precipices around the base of an isolated rocky hill, descending two hundred and seventy feet, nearly twice the height of Niagara Falls, in a distance of twenty-two miles. No one has ever tried to run the rapids of the canyon, and lived; they are now avoided by a portage from Hudson's Hope around the hill. Unwittingly Mackenzie, in going up the stream, was attempting to overcome an impassable obstacle. His men made some progress that day by towing and poling; once the canoe was broken, and its contents

soaked; then it was dragged up a furious rapid with the men in continual danger of being crushed by stones falling from the high banks; later it was broken again. The next day was even worse. Every hour or two they had to stop to repair damage to the canoe; it had to be pulled up slippery rocks over almost perpendicular portages, and towed by men clinging to the edge of the cliff so that the line should not get tangled in the trees. At the mid-day halt it was carelessly tied, and was just saved from vanishing down the stream; yet Mackenzie remembered to take his observation for latitude at noon. At 5 o'clock they reached a place where "the river was one continual rapid". Taking everything out of the canoe, they started to tow it up; a great wave broke the line, which "filled us with inexpressible dismay, as it appeared impossible that the vessel could escape from being dashed to pieces and those who were in her from perishing." Very luckily, however, another wave drove her ashore, clear over some bare rocks, without any serious damage.

That night the men, worn out and despairing, began to mutter that there was no alternative but to turn back. Mackenzie paid no heed, and walked forward to observe the river. Seeing that further progress by water was impossible, he sent Mackay and some men in the morning to look for a portage. They came back at sunset with the news that they had succeeded in reaching the top of the canyon after going nine miles through very thick woods. "A kettle of wild rice, sweetened with sugar, which had been prepared for their return, with the usual regale of rum, soon renewed that courage which disdained all obstacles which threatened our progress." Next day (May 22) was almost wholly consumed in getting the baggage and canoe from the riverside up the

precipice; the canoe had to be warped up by a line fastened to trees, so steep was the climb. They spent two days more in forcing their way to the end of the portage, across hill and valley and through the debris of a forest fire. They emerged on the 24th, exhausted and torn by thorns, at the head of the rapids at a spot where the great river narrowed to a width of thirty-five yards and began a zig-zag course, dashing in huge waves from cliff to cliff.

The worst of their troubles were over for the moment. The river was swift, but smooth. The weather, however, was so cold that the men had to wear blanket coats even in the heat of the day. They were passing through the main chain of the Rockies, but they met with only a few rapids, of no great difficulty. On the 29th violent rain prevented movement, and Mackenzie amused himself by writing an account of their journey and sending it down the current in an empty rum-keg. On the 31st they passed beneath the shadow of Mount Selwyn, over six thousand feet high, at the western end of the pass; soon after they ascended the Finlay Rapids without trouble, and arrived at the Forks. It had taken them twenty-three days to go two hundred and fifty miles, whereas on the whole Arctic voyage the average rate of progress had been nearly thirty miles a day.

At the Forks the Finlay, flowing from the north-west, meets the Parsnip, flowing from the south-east, and their waters unite to form the Peace. Mackenzie's own instinct was to go up the Finlay, which appeared to be the larger and more in the right direction; but the old Indian had been very explicit, saying that the Finlay soon lost itself in the mountains, while the Parsnip would lead them to a portage to

the west. Though his men protested against ascending the more rapid current of the Parsnip, Mackenzie followed the Indian's advice, and it was well that he did so, for the Finlay would have taken him north into a mountain wilderness through which he never could have reached the Pacific. Sulkily they turned southwards, the voyageurs openly cursing their folly in going with Mackenzie.

(2) *Across the Great Divide*

The next stage involved the ascent of the Parsnip to its source, the discovery of a carrying-place between its headwaters and those of a river flowing to the west, and the descent of any stream which they might reach on the other side until it joined the great river of which they had heard. It was, perhaps, the most hazardous stage of the journey; it would have been very easy to go astray by following a stream from which there was no possible path over the height of land; and they were wrestling all the time with the rushing waters of snow-fed torrents. This stage was rather more than two hundred miles in length, and took them seventeen days.

The current in the Parsnip was so swift that some of the party walked along the shore whenever this was possible, and even with the lightened canoe ten or a dozen miles were a hard and long day's travel. On June 6 the current was too strong for paddling, the depth too great for poling, and the banks too thickly wooded for towing, so that for some miles they could make headway only by pulling themselves along

by the branches of trees. About this time they passed without noticing it the mouth of the Pack River; this, had they known it, would have been their easiest way to the Fraser River, for it leads to Giscome Portage and is still the regular highway to the region in which they were. The heart-breaking work was telling on the spirits of the men, and Mackenzie was beginning to fear that he was on a wild-goose chase. He had seen no natives since May 13, and had no confirmation of the old Indian's story.

At last on the 9th they fell in with a small party of Indians. At first much frightened, they threatened the strangers with bow and spear, and were with difficulty persuaded to meet them. They had never seen white men, but they had heard of them, and they possessed iron which Mackenzie knew was not the product of the country. Mackenzie was most anxious to get on good terms so as to learn the exact situation of the portage. When they were finally pacified and decked out with presents, he had them questioned by his interpreter. The results were not very satisfactory at first, for they said that they knew nothing of a river to the west and that their iron came from a tribe with which they traded. "They represented the latter as travelling, during a moon, to get to the country of other tribes, who live in houses, ... and that these also extend their journeys in the same manner to the sea coast, or, to use their expression, the Stinking Lake, where they trade with people like us that come there in vessels as big as islands." This was the first definite report of the western ocean that Mackenzie had secured. He was suspicious that they were not telling all they knew, and doubtful of his interpreter; yet he could get no more out of them that day. For a time he thought of going by land along the track by

which the iron had come from the coast; it was no use toiling up the river if it led nowhere. He renewed his attentions to the natives, giving them pemmican and their children sugar, and he asked no more questions until the morning. Then, after a long and fruitless examination, Mackenzie, who had some knowledge of more than one Indian language, chanced to catch some mention of a great river, accompanied by a gesture upstream. Seizing on the clue, he discovered that the native knew of "a large river that runs towards the mid-day sun, a branch of which flowed near the source of that which we were now navigating; and that there were only three small lakes and as many carrying-places leading to a small river which discharges itself into the great river." The missing link in his knowledge was supplied, a native was induced to come as guide, and they prepared to start at once.

Soon after leaving the Indian camp the Parsnip approached the mountains and became very narrow and tortuous. On the 11th they turned from the main stream up a branch so small that they could scarcely force the canoe through. This soon brought them to a lake where there were beaver, geese, duck, and swans in great abundance. "This I consider," writes Mackenzie, "as the highest and southernmost source of the Unjigah or Peace River." He was at the headwaters of the mighty river which he had followed four years before to its mouth on the Arctic Ocean, twenty-five hundred miles away; even if he failed to reach the Pacific his achievement was great, for he was the first white man to see the river for two-thirds of its length. Landing at the head of the lake, they found a portage eight hundred paces long which led them over a low ridge between two mountains to another small lake. On this portage they crossed the height of land; the

second lake drained to the west and the Pacific. They had passed the Great Divide, and were now heading downstream. The greatest problem of the whole journey had been solved: they had found a canoe-route through the mountains. They must have launched their canoe with light hearts at the end of the portage, in a little lake which is one of the sources of the Fraser River.

They were, however, soon disillusioned. Their way was down a mountain torrent, choked by fallen timber and driftwood, winding in great circles, and with a furious current on a stony bed. Mackenzie names it on his map, simply and with justice, Bad River. They were soon brought into dangers as acute as those they had surmounted in Peace River Canyon. When Mackenzie would have walked to lighten the load, those in the canoe urged him to embark, "declaring that if they perished I should perish with them." A few minutes later they came near to death. The canoe struck and was split, and before they could bring it to land it was swept on down the stream. Both bow and stern were shattered against rocks, large rents were torn in the bottom, and all the thwarts but one were dragged from their fastenings. The bowman seized a branch to stop them, and was violently jerked out on to the shore. The canoe flattened on the water, its occupants jumped into the icy stream, and they were carried several hundred yards clinging to the wreck. At last they were borne, numb with cold, into shallow water, and were able to unload their drenched belongings. The only serious loss was almost the whole stock of bullets. Mackenzie calls their escape from death miraculous.

Immediately after the accident the men began to argue that they must now turn back. Mackenzie made no answer until they had had a good meal and an ample ration of rum. Then he addressed them, appealing to the courage and resolution which were "the peculiar boast of the North men," and emphasizing the disgrace of surrender after they had come so far. At last he overcame their fears, and they consented to go on. The next two days were spent in reconstructing the canoe, which had by this time become very heavy from the amount of bark and gum used in repairs. On June 15 they resumed their journey, carrying some of the baggage along the shore on account of the weakness of the canoe. Finally after three days of incessant toil, during which the guide deserted and they had to portage through swamps and to stop continually to mend the canoe, on the evening of the 17th they arrived at the bank of a large river. "At length we enjoyed, after all our toil and anxiety, the inexpressible satisfaction of finding ourselves on the bank of a navigable river, on the west side of the first great range of mountains."

(3) *In the Valley of the Fraser*

The river on the banks of which they stood was the Fraser, and Mackenzie was almost certainly the first white man to see its waters anywhere on their long course from the Rockies to its mouth on the Pacific. He now believed that all the greatest difficulties were behind him: he had only to descend the river for an unknown distance to find the ocean. The exact situation of the party was on the North Fork, about

thirty miles above its junction with the larger South Fork. They started downstream at eight the next morning, and, aided by the swift current, they made over seventy miles during the day. Next day they reached the first serious rapids (those in Prince George Canyon), and had to carry the canoe, now scarcely serviceable, with the greatest difficulty over a high hill. A few Indians were seen on the shore, but they showed great fear, shot some arrows at the strangers, and ran away. On the 20th Mackenzie stopped to examine a deserted Indian house, a large building and the only habitation of the kind he had seen in the North-West; it contained an ingenious wooden salmon-trap of which he gives a minute description. Later the canoe was nearly wrecked in running a rapid.

On the 21st a bag of pemmican was cached in a hole over which a fire was lighted to hide all traces of the excavation—Mackenzie's usual method of concealment. A short time afterwards he succeeded in getting into contact with some natives. At first sight of the canoe they "manifested by their gestures that they were resolved to attack us if we should venture to land," and made their meaning clearer by a volley of arrows. Mackenzie was not easily put off; he needed information badly, as he had no guide; and if he did not prove his good intentions these Indians might rouse all the people of the valley against him and place him in a most dangerous position. He therefore landed and walked away from his men along the opposite shore of the river, though he secretly stationed a man in the woods to protect him if he were attacked. His interpreter meanwhile assured the Indians on the other bank of his friendliness, and Mackenzie held out trinkets to encourage them. Slowly two of the natives were induced to come across the river, take the presents, and

return to their friends. Soon he had won their confidence, and was eagerly enquiring about the course of the river and the distance to the sea. The replies he received, both here and lower down, were reasonably accurate and far from encouraging. Instead of being a short and easy highway to the sea, the river was blocked by many dangerous falls and rapids, and its banks were peopled by fierce tribes; moreover, it ran an immense distance to the south, out of Mackenzie's direct course, before reaching the Pacific.

Undaunted, he continued the descent of the river next day, with a couple of the natives to conduct him. He had only gone a few miles when he landed on seeing some Indians "whose appearance was more wild and ferocious than any whom we had yet seen." Even his native guides had difficulty in persuading them not to attack the strangers; but once this was done, they gave Mackenzie a cordial invitation to spend the night at their lodges. Here he remained for a day, and in the course of it he took an important decision. He secured confirmation of all which he had learnt about the river, and he discovered a good deal more besides. There had been some trade up the valley from the ocean, and one old man said that as long as he could remember he had heard of white people to the south. Now, however, their metal implements came into the district from the coast by a trail over the mountains, short and well-marked, which began at a spot passed by Mackenzie some way up the river. They met the Coast Indians six days' journey along this trail, and exchanged their own furs and leather for short iron bars, brass, copper, and beads, all of which were procured from white men who came in ships.

Mackenzie decided that, with his provisions and ammunition running low, with his men alarmed by the dangers of the river below them, and with the distance to the ocean by it so great, it would be folly to attempt the descent. He conceived that he was on the upper reaches of the River of the West (the Columbia), the mouth of which, five or six hundred miles to the south, had figured in a conjectural fashion for many years on the maps of the coast. Not until Simon Fraser in 1807 had dared the great dangers of which Mackenzie had heard and had gone down the Fraser to the sea, was it known that two great rivers, not one, drained the interior of British Columbia. Eliminating the route by the river, there remained the mountain-trail, to reach which they had to turn and to go upstream for several days. Doubtful whether his men would consent to the added and novel toil of an overland march, Mackenzie took them into his confidence. He told them that he had resolved to try the land route, but that, if he failed to reach the Pacific by it, he meant to come back and descend the river to its mouth. "I declared in the most solemn manner that I would not abandon my design of reaching the sea, if I made the attempt alone, and that I did not despair of returning in safety to my friends." In reply his men assured him of their zeal, and they made ready to depart up the river. The guide whom they had engaged insisted on going by land, and Mackenzie, made wary by much experience, sent Mackay and his two interpreters to keep him company. The village of Alexandria, named in honour of the explorer, stands at the point where he turned back.

Next morning (June 24) they were suddenly menaced by as acute a peril as any they had met, though this time the

danger was from man, not nature. As they were toiling against the current, Mackay and the two Indians of the party appeared on the bank in a state of extreme alarm. The guide had met some angry natives who had told him something which set him off running as fast as he could; they had kept with him for a time, but he had finally left them. The lives of the whole party were in imminent danger. The first Indians they had seen, those who had shot at them on the 19th, had spread evil reports, and the sudden change in plan, with the appearance of the white men up the river again, had convinced the natives that they were enemies. The voyageurs despaired at the news, and wished to make for home at once; Mackenzie himself was filled with "sensations little short of agony". The men almost mutinied; once they loaded the canoe without orders, and Mackenzie thought that they were about to defy his authority. It was essential that he should get in touch again with the natives before an attack was made. He spent two anxious days beside the river with guards always posted. On the morning of the 26th they found an old blind man in the woods; convincing him that they were friends, they started upstream, and against his will took him with them as a hostage. All the houses which they had passed on the way down had been deserted with great haste.

The canoe was in such a condition that they could use it no longer. For some time Mackenzie had been collecting materials for a new vessel. On the 27th they reached an island where there was suitable timber, and there they passed the next four days, cruelly tormented by flies, in constructing a new canoe, which turned out to be "a stronger and better boat than the old one". All this time the natives continued to avoid them. On the 29th Mackenzie was overjoyed by the

return of the guide who had run away from Mackay; he apologized for his desertion, and said that he had spent the days since he left in calming the fears of his kinsfolk. He departed, however, two mornings later while Mackenzie was asleep, though he left a message that he would meet him higher up. On July 2 they launched their new vessel and ascended a dangerous rapid. Mackenzie was very uncertain both of his own men, who were thoroughly disheartened and who had to be put on short rations, and of the natives, of whom they saw no sign. Next morning they reached the mouth of the river (the West Road or Blackwater) from which the trail to the coast began. The guide had not returned, and Mackenzie was at a loss what to do since he could not attempt the trail without a guide. Fortunately after a few hours' delay the guide arrived. The danger was over, the natives were pacified, and the party could go forward once more. They had been in the Fraser valley for seventeen days, and had advanced little more than one hundred miles towards their goal.

(4) *Across the Mountains*

The nearest point on the coast was still about two hundred miles away in a straight line, and the intervening country was a tangle of mountain ranges and high plateaus, dotted with small lakes and intersected by the deep valleys of many winding streams. In such a region the track was hard to find and difficult to travel; it wound between mountains, crossed and recrossed rivers, led through swamps, and climbed over

high passes. Its windings made its length more than three hundred miles. Guides were essential, and their fickle friend from the Fraser River soon would go no further. Fortunately now the natives were numerous and not unfriendly, and, except for one short gap, they were able to secure temporary guides from each party of Indians to lead them to the next band. The section of Mackenzie's journal in which he describes the fourteen days of this overland march, toilsome as it was, is the most vivid and interesting part of the book. The mode of travel, the natives, the scenery, all were new to him, and he was certain that every step was taking him nearer to the attainment of his supreme desire.

Before leaving their canoe they had to conceal everything which they could not carry with them. They made two secret caches of their most valuable supplies—gunpowder, pemmican, corn, and wild rice—and put the rest in a strong log enclosure; the canoe they placed on a stage, well shielded from the sun. They were heavily laden: each of the voyageurs carried a pack of ninety pounds and his gun; the Indian hunters shouldered with great reluctance half this burden; and Mackenzie and Mackay took seventy pounds each. The tube of Mackenzie's telescope was an annoying addition to his load. They carried only pemmican as food, and had but two meals a day, "which were regulated without difficulty, as our provisions did not require the ceremony of cooking." They were generally able to procure a few fish from the natives.

They started up the trail at noon on July 4, first in great heat and then through drenching rain. They were in a region of heavy rainfall and were soaked to the skin almost every

day until they reached the coast. Their route was a little south of west, roughly along the course of the Blackwater River, though they rarely saw it and often cut across country to avoid its wanderings. The first natives they met had many articles of European origin, including "a lance that very much resembled a sergeant's halberd." Mackenzie continually notes new characteristics among the Indians; at their first camp on the trail he was pleased with their plaintive singing, which had "somewhat the air of church music." Next day, at another camp, he discovered and secured by exchange two half-pence which were hung as ornaments in children's ears, one English of George III and the other coined in Massachusetts in 1787. He was obviously in a district in which traffic with European and American vessels was frequent. That night, in fear lest his guides should desert, he heroically slept with one of them. The man's beaver robe was "a nest of vermin", his hair was greased with fish-oil, and his body smeared with red earth; but Mackenzie was so exhausted that he "passed a night of sound repose", in spite of the defects of his bed-fellow.

On the 6th they made rapid progress at first over level ground, before they began to climb the slopes of the Telegraph Range. That evening, for the first time since leaving Fort Chipewyan, Mackenzie forgot to wind his watch; but since he had had no opportunity of correcting it for nine months except from his own observations, it did not much matter. On the 7th they had a trying day; after passing the hills, they crossed a swampy plateau "that was seldom less than knee deep," and they did not stop until 7.30, when they had walked twenty-six miles. He noticed for the first time that day the great care with which the natives of this

region tended their graves. On the 8th he reached the banks of the Blackwater again after a march in pouring rain. Though provisions were very short, he cached a half-bag of pemmican against their return. The party followed the river for thirty miles, with snow-covered mountains now visible before them. On the morning of the 10th they crossed it on a raft, and went up a small branch to the beautiful Cluskus Lakes, where they fell in with some natives, more attractive than any they had yet seen, who presented them with fish and gave them cheering reports of the road to the sea. Mackenzie noted with approval that their women were not kept in the usual Indian condition of abject slavery.

A quotation from his entry for July 11 illustrates the difficulties of their mode of travel:

I passed a most uncomfortable night: the first part of it I was tormented with flies, and in the latter deluged with rain. In the morning the weather cleared, and as soon as our clothes were dried we proceeded through a morass. This part of the country had been laid waste by fire, and the fallen trees added to the pain and perplexity of our way.... Though the rain returned, we continued our progress till noon, when our guides took to some trees for shelter. We then spread our oil-cloth, and with some difficulty made a fire. About two the rain ceased, when we continued our journey.... At five in the afternoon we were so wet and cold (for it had at intervals continued to rain) that we were compelled to stop for the night.

We passed seven rivulets and a creek in this day's journey.... Our distance could not have been less than fifteen miles.

He was forced that night to reduce rations still further, and his guides and hunters united in complaint at the rapidity of their march.

On the 12th he met and surmounted the most serious danger of this stage of the journey. They started early and travelled late, crossing once more to the north bank of the Blackwater a few miles above Lake Tsacha, and covering thirty-six miles. In the late afternoon the guides deserted them, and they were left entirely alone. The voyageurs were "filled with alarm of a nature to defy immediate alleviation," and Mackenzie had hard work to cheer them up. They were surrounded by snowy mountains, and the cold added to their trials. A guide they must have if they were to go on. In the morning they saw a house by a river, from which smoke was rising. Mackenzie went up to it alone; as soon as he was seen "the women and children uttered the most horrid shrieks, and the only man who appeared to be with them escaped out of a back door." Gradually the women were calmed and won over by presents, but the man hid behind trees and threatened to shoot whenever Mackenzie approached. He spent the whole day in persuading him and some other Indians who arrived to accept without fear the amazing spectacle of a party of white men in the heart of a region still very rarely crossed. At last they consented to become his guides.

With confidence restored, they pushed on next day over a hill which divides the headwaters of the Blackwater and the Nechako Rivers, past Gatcho Lake, where they examined a very neat and well-made dwelling, and then, turning south, across the Dean River on the Pacific slope. On the 15th they fell in with a party of Indians "of a very pleasing aspect" carrying furs to barter with the coast tribes. Before them lay a range of snow-clad mountains (the Tsi-Tsutl Mts.), across which they had to go to reach the valley of the Bella Coola River, which was to take them to the sea. On the 17th they gained the summit, a high snow-filled pass, in extreme cold. They were able to see a large village in the valley far below them, but the descent was steep and long, and night came before they could reach it. Stumbling down through thick woods, they arrived in pitch darkness at a cluster of houses. Mackenzie entered one, threw down his pack, and seated himself among its occupants. These were Coast Indians, of a different race and language from those he had previously seen. He was received without surprise, and was conducted to the largest house in the village.

(5) *On the Shore of the Pacific*

The village they had reached, which Mackenzie later named Friendly Village, was situated at the junction of Burnt Bridge Creek with Bella Coola River. He and his men were greeted with ceremony and honour in the house of the chief, Soocomlick, though they could only communicate with their cordial host by means of signs. It was a large building,

containing three fires, and the leading men of the community gathered in it to meet the strangers. They were regaled with a plentiful meal of salmon, prepared in a number of ways, and they retired for the night with the consciousness that their goal was almost in sight. "I never enjoyed," writes Mackenzie, "a more sound and refreshing rest, though I had a board for my bed and a billet for my pillow." In the morning the attentions of the natives were renewed. It was the height of the salmon fishery, and Mackenzie observed with interest the ingenious weirs built to catch the fish on their way upstream to spawn. Salmon was almost the only food of the natives; they preserved an enormous supply in the season for use during the rest of the year. They would not touch flesh, and had superstitious fears that its use, or even its approach to the river, would drive the fish away. A dog that ate the bone of a deer which Mackenzie's men had killed in the mountains was beaten until he brought it up; a native dived at once into the river to retrieve another bone thrown in by a voyageur; and they would not permit the visitors to go on the water with venison in the canoe.

The party was now only about thirty miles from the sea, though the distance was twice as far by the course of the river. At one next day (July 18) they went forward in two borrowed canoes steered by men of the village. Their skill astonished Mackenzie: "I had imagined that the Canadians who accompanied me were the most expert canoemen in the world, but they are very inferior to these people, as they themselves acknowledged, in conducting those vessels." They came in a couple of hours to another village—Great Village—still some distance from the sea. Landing and approaching it through a wood, they were alarmed to see

men fetching their weapons and great confusion among the houses. Mackenzie went steadily on, and shook hands with those nearest him in the crowd which at once surrounded him. Suddenly the chief broke through the throng, and took him in his arms; then the chief's son flung around Mackenzie's shoulders his own very handsome robe of sea-otter skins. All was well. They were conducted to the finest house they had yet seen, and were given a repast of roasted salmon followed by a special local delicacy, the inner bark of the hemlock made into cakes and soaked in salmon oil. All the men of the village crowded in behind them while they ate, and the feast lasted for three hours. Mackenzie made presents of a blanket (in return for the sea-otter robe), of scissors to clip the old chief's beard, and of other articles; then he made a tour of the village, and examined its houses and totems with curiosity.

There he spent the night. Next morning he was called on to exercise his medical skill on one of the chief's sons, whom he found in a dying condition. Realizing the danger to his party if he attempted a cure and failed, he only gave him a few drops of balsam, which could do him no harm, and left the rest to the sorcery of the local physicians. The chief proudly showed him his collection of European articles—clothes, and copper, brass, and iron utensils of British, Spanish, and American manufacture. One curious ornament, the popularity of which was due to a clever American trader, was a collar of twisted iron bars weighing upwards of twelve pounds, a heavy burden for fashion to impose.

When Mackenzie produced his instruments for his usual observation of the sun at noon, the natives showed

apprehension lest their use should frighten the salmon from the river, and were glad to hasten his departure. He examined by the riverside an immense canoe, built of cedar and elaborately decorated, in which the chief told him, as well as he could by sign-language, that he had gone to the south about ten years before and had there met two vessels full of white people. They continued their voyage in a large canoe with four men from the village as guides, one the son of the chief. After stopping at two or three houses on the way they reached in the late afternoon a village from which most of the inhabitants were absent. This was Bella Coola, or Rascals' Village, as Mackenzie named it. "From these houses," he writes, "I could perceive the termination of the river, and its discharge into a narrow arm of the sea." Those are the words, without any further adornment, in which he records the achievement of his great ambition, an ambition which had driven him, through peril from man and nature and by grinding toil, first to the Arctic and then to the Pacific Ocean.

After spending the night in an unoccupied house, the party covered the short distance to the sea in the morning. Two of the natives refused to accompany them further. "At about eight we got out of the river, which discharges itself by various channels into an arm of the sea. The tide was out, and had left a large space covered with sea-weed. The surrounding hills were involved in fog." They saw a number of what they thought were sea-otters, but were really seals. They had reached the head of Bentinck North Arm, about three-fifths of the way from Vancouver to Prince Rupert up the coast of British Columbia. They were still far from the open ocean, for the shore is cut by narrow inlets which run

inland for as much as a hundred miles. Mackenzie's object in going further was to find "a proper place for taking an observation," a spot from which there was a view, preferably to the south, for some miles across open water. He was also very anxious to get a clear sight of the moon and stars, so as to be able to determine his longitude by calculating Greenwich time. At two a high swell forced them to land for the night in a cove on the north shore of the bay; here their native escort was reduced to the chief's son alone.

Next morning (July 21) they put out at six. After steering west for seven miles, they turned up Labouchere Channel for seven miles, then south-west down Dean Channel. Here they had an unpleasant encounter which came near to wrecking the expedition at the moment of its success. Fifteen men in three canoes appeared, and examined the party "with an air of indifference and disdain".

One of them in particular made me understand, with an air of insolence, that a large canoe had lately been in this bay, with people in her like me, and that one of them, whom he called *Macubah*, had fired on him and his friends, and that *Bensins* had struck him on the back with the flat part of his sword.... At the same time he illustrated these circumstances by the assistance of my gun and sword; and I do not doubt but he well deserved the treatment which he described.

It so happened, by a strange coincidence, that Vancouver had visited and charted this part of the coast only a few weeks before, and the Indian was evidently referring to a meeting with his party. The newcomers insisted on keeping in company with Mackenzie; they persuaded the young chief from Great Village to enter one of their boats; and the "troublesome fellow" forced his way into Mackenzie's canoe. He demanded numerous presents, and persuaded Mackenzie to steer across the inlet towards his village. Landing on the opposite shore at a ruined village near the mouth of Elcho Harbour, they were at once visited by an imposing fleet of ten canoes the occupants of which urged them to go on with them to the village. The behaviour of the natives was such that Mackenzie was certain that they were about to attack, and for the first time he admitted his fears to his men. His party, therefore, took possession of a steep rock "which permitted of our defending ourselves in case we should be attacked," and prepared to spend the night. At last their visitors departed at sunset, after stealing several articles.

Indians from another village, less violently disposed, came in the evening, told them of Vancouver's visit, and tried to barter an otter skin: "When I offered them what they did not choose to accept for the otter-skin, they shook their heads and very distinctly answered 'No, no.' And to mark their refusal of anything we asked from them, they emphatically employed the same British monosyllable." They left in peace; and the party made a scanty meal, for provisions were almost exhausted, and, after posting guards, retired for the night. The rock was the furthest limit of their voyage. The scene on it the following morning has been described at the beginning of this narrative. All traces of Mackenzie's famous

inscription have long since vanished, but the exact location of the rock, even the very spot on which the inscription was painted, has recently been determined.

Fortunately the weather was clear, and Mackenzie was able to make a series of observations of the sun, both from the rock and from a point further up the inlet to which they moved. He had managed also to observe the eclipse of Jupiter's satellites, and was able from this to determine his longitude with approximate accuracy. "I had now determined my situation," he writes, "which is the most fortunate circumstance of my long, painful and perilous journey, as a few cloudy days would have prevented me from ascertaining the final longitude of it." That is the note of the true explorer.

(6) *The Return*

Mackenzie's problem now was to get back to Fort Chipewyan before winter set in, with his men weary and his supplies almost gone. He had learned in England of Vancouver's expedition, and there is some slight evidence that he had hoped to meet Vancouver's vessels and return by sea. If he had entertained this hope, he had never built upon it; in any case it had now vanished, and the return by land must begin at once. His immediate situation was perilous; the hostile Indians were hanging round, and Mackenzie kept the young chief with him only by force. They travelled all the night of July 22, pressing forward eagerly to leave their enemies behind. Landing next day below Rascals' Village,

they were deserted by the young chief, who refused to wait while they dragged the canoe up the beach. Mackenzie followed him alone, as he could not afford to let him get out of his sight. As soon as Mackenzie reached the village he was surrounded by a menacing crowd of armed men, including the fellow who claimed to have been fired on by Vancouver. He drew his pistols and resolved to sell his life dearly. They closed in round him, and one had grasped his arms from behind, when his men arrived from the beach with their guns. The Indians at once took to flight, and hid among the houses. Mackenzie determined to teach them a lesson. In the scuffle they had stolen his hat and cloak, as well as other articles on their previous meeting. He now made his men prime their muskets, and demanded the immediate restoration of all they had taken. The Indians were cowed by this show of force, and his orders were sullenly obeyed. The missing property was restored, and at once the party started up stream towards the Great Village.

All were nervous about their reception there, for the young chief had gone ahead, and so had the insolent Indian and some of his companions. Progress by canoe was so slow against the current that Mackenzie would gladly have travelled by land, but that one of his own Indians was too ill to walk. After toiling for a while in the canoe, the men were seized with sudden panic, vowed they would not enter the canoe again, and announced their intention of trying to scale the mountains at once so as to avoid Great Village. They showed their sincerity by throwing part of their loads into the river. Mackenzie, after waiting patiently for a while, told them that they were fools, that they would die of cold and hunger in the hills, and that they would have to go without

him, since he would never leave the sick Indian behind. Finally he, with Mackay, who had behaved admirably throughout, and two voyageurs, took the canoe upstream by pulling it from branch to branch, while the rest followed on shore. They were received fairly well at the houses which they passed, and they managed to persuade some natives to help them in the canoe next day.

On the 25th they approached Great Village in a state of great apprehension. They were, however, received without open hostility, though with a coldness in marked contrast to the warmth of their first visit. A lavish distribution of presents won them a measure of favour again, and they went on their way the same day. They were all cheered by the recovery of their dog, which had been lost on the way down the valley. Next morning they reached Friendly Village once more, and all the cordiality of their first reception was repeated. Soocomlick heaped presents upon them, and Mackenzie made such return as he was able. He gives a pleasant picture of the busy life of the village, the men fishing and the women preparing the fish. "Of the many tribes of savage people whom I have seen," he comments, "these appear to be the most susceptible of civilization." They lived in permanent villages in solid houses, instead of wandering with their tepees from place to place, though they probably moved once in the year from the coast upstream for the fishery. They had an effective system of government, under an hereditary chief with considerable power. They had temples of religion, and they rarely went to war. Their food supply was abundant, and their implements were well-constructed.

The party left these friends after a short halt, and spent the afternoon toiling up the steep mountain over which the trail passed. The rest of the journey need not detain us long. On August 4 they reached the Fraser River without meeting a single person on the way. Recovering their canoe and the supplies which they had cached, they started upstream on the 6th, and arrived at the mouth of the Bad River on the 14th. The water was now low, and its ascent, though hard enough, provided no perils like those of the descent. On the 16th they crossed the portage to the headwaters of the Parsnip. Mackenzie had to submit to being carried, as his feet and ankles were so swollen that he could scarcely walk. Their labours were now nearly over, as they were aided by the stream for all the rest of the way. They went down the Parsnip to the Forks of the Peace in three days, compared with eleven spent on the ascent. On the 21st they crossed the great portage around Peace River Canyon. On the 24th:

As we rounded a point and came in view of the fort, we threw out our flag and accompanied it with a general discharge of our firearms; while the men were in such spirits and made such an active use of their paddles that we arrived before the two men whom we left here in the spring could recover their senses to answer us. Thus we landed at four in the afternoon at the place which we left on the ninth of May.

They had been absent one hundred and eight days, seventy-five of which were spent on the outward trip and only thirty-three on the return. Their whole journey, except

for the few miles on the Pacific, had been through country never before seen by white men. On this, as on the Arctic voyage, there had been no loss of life or serious accident. The great riddle Mackenzie had set himself was answered; and he records at the end of his journal, under date of August 24, the ending of his career as an explorer:

Here my voyages of discovery terminate. Their toils and their dangers, their solitudes and sufferings, have not been exaggerated in my description. On the contrary, in many instances, language has failed me in the attempt to describe them. I received, however, the reward of my labours, for they were crowned with success.

CHAPTER VII

MACKENZIE'S GRAND DESIGN

Mackenzie pushed on at once from his post of the previous winter down the river to Fort Chipewyan. There he spent his last season in the North-West; after his great success as an explorer he was more than ever disgusted with the squalor and dreariness of the life of an ordinary fur-trader. During the winter he laboured at preparing the journal of his expeditions from the rough notes which he had made on the way; literary

composition did not come easy to him, and seven years passed before the book was ready for publication. He went out to Grand Portage in the spring of 1794. At the meeting there he was appointed an agent of the Company, a coveted post which involved his residence in Montreal. Simon McTavish, the principal agent, was not popular with the wintering partners; Mackenzie, as we have seen, found him hard to get on with, and his lordly demeanour had earned him the nicknames of "The Premier" and "The Marquis". Mackenzie's appointment as agent was regarded by the winterers as a guarantee that their interests would be protected, for he was one of themselves, trained in the same stern school of the North-West. He was bound to the Company, by the agreement of 1790, until the end of 1798.

He went from Grand Portage to Montreal through the Great Lakes. We get a glimpse of him at Niagara in September with Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, presenting a sea-otter skin as a proof that he had reached the Pacific, and entertaining Mrs. Simcoe with travellers' tales of the fish-eating dwellers on its shores. To Simcoe he wrote a short report of his explorations, and in conversation he revealed a design which occupies a very important place in his subsequent career. Simcoe considered it of enough interest to add to a long report on western problems which he was preparing for the British government. Mackenzie, who "seems to be as intelligent as he is adventurous," was eager that the fur-trade on the Pacific Coast should develop in British hands. If this was to take place, the establishment of "one common interest" to regulate the trade was the first need. Two posts should also be built by the government on the coast. It was possible to conduct trade

with the coast from the St. Lawrence across the North-West, but the easiest route from England was by Hudson Bay, the western shore of which is half way across the continent. The route by sea around Cape Horn was also cheaper than the thousands of miles of transport by canoe involved in crossing the continent. The man-supply on the coast should be drawn from Lower Canada, as the voyageurs were far more likely to remain on good terms with the Indians than the crews of trading vessels.

We have seen Mackenzie as explorer and fur-trader; in Simcoe's report we get the first glimpse of him as a statesman seeking the means to follow up his discoveries by extending British influence and British trade on the Pacific. There were formidable obstacles in his way, of all of which he does not seem to have been aware in 1794. In the first place there were three commercial monopolies of long standing, granted by the British government to chartered companies. The Hudson's Bay Company, however indolently it protected its rights, possessed by its charter exclusive powers of trade and government not merely on the Bay itself, but over all the enormous territory which drained into the Bay, an area extending west to the Rockies and south far into what is now the United States. Though it could not prevent competition in the interior, it could and did confine to its own servants the use of the shores of the Bay. The second monopoly was that of the East India Company; by charter it possessed the exclusive right of British trade in China. It may seem strange that this right hindered the development of the far West, yet that was the case. China absorbed each year a large quantity of the finest furs, and for furs from the Pacific coast Canton was the nearest and best market. But the trade

of British subjects to Canton was wholly controlled by the East India Company; and the Company was so jealous of its privileges that British traders on the coast were actually forced to sail under a foreign flag, and by 1800 had been driven out by Americans, who had to endure no such restrictions. The third monopoly belonged to the South Sea Company. No British vessel could trade west of Cape Horn without its permission. Every British vessel on the coast had to pay toll to the South Sea Company, while foreigners were free to trade as they would.

A second set of obstacles lay in the undetermined sovereignty of the coast. The boundary with the United States between Lake Superior and the Rockies was not drawn until 1818. Though before then the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company was recognized as British, the vague terms of the charter had to be defined, and were in fact incompatible with the treaty of peace with the United States of 1783. West of the Rockies the situation was more complex. Russia was in possession of Alaska; Spain occupied California and for centuries had claimed the rest of the coast. In 1790 Spain by the Nootka Convention had renounced under threat of war her exclusive sovereignty over the middle coast. This was left without an owner, to be acquired in later years by Great Britain, Russia, and the United States; not until 1846 was its status finally settled. In this no-man's land, sovereignty could be established only through effective occupation by the subjects of the country concerned. If, therefore, the Pacific coast was to become British, British subjects had to be persuaded to go there. The fur-trade at that time was the only reason for their going, and hence it was vital to encourage the fur-trade and to limit the cramping monopolies.

The third, and perhaps the greatest, obstacle to Mackenzie's plans was the indifference of the British government. The conditions just mentioned provided plenty of excuses for doing nothing. Britain, moreover, was deeply involved in the great war with revolutionary France, and Ministers were too preoccupied with Europe to pay attention to the ends of the world. No assistance could be expected from them.

The conditions affecting the extension of British influence on the Pacific coast are stated here because Mackenzie, fresh from his triumphant journey, first urged in a practical form in 1794 that a British North America should be created stretching from sea to sea. Nothing was then done, and we hear no more of his plan for some years. His later efforts to realize it are narrated below. On his arrival in Montreal, he made a report to Lord Dorchester, the governor-general, and during the winter he sailed for England from a port of the United States in order to place without delay a full account of his discoveries before the British government. We know nothing of his reception in London, except that no action was taken in accordance with his ideas.

On his return to Canada in the summer of 1795 he was for some years engrossed by his duties as an agent. He had become perhaps the most prominent figure in the fur-trade, though he was not as yet a wealthy man. The veterans of the Company, McTavish in particular, whose wintering days were long past and who were enjoying their comfortable incomes in Montreal, disliked the intrusion of this popular and restless young rival who had pushed his way to the front so rapidly and had dimmed their own fame by his

achievements in exploration. The Company, indeed, after preserving its self-made monopoly intact since 1787, was once more beginning to break up. In 1795 rivals entered the field, backed by a Montreal firm, Forsyth, Richardson and Company; though at first these were able to secure only a small share of the trade, they grew steadily stronger. The Hudson's Bay Company also was becoming more vigorous in the interior. When an arrangement was made in the autumn of 1795 for renewing the North West Company's agreement after its expiration in 1798, it was noticeable that Mackenzie did not sign it on his own behalf. Clearly he was not on happy terms with some of his associates, and one may surmise that their reluctance to accept his schemes of westward expansion was a cause of disagreement.

In Montreal he was a leader in the lavish hospitality and gay social life of the period. He was elected in 1795 to the Beaver Club, the exclusive dining-club of the fur-traders, every member of which had wintered in the North-West. The fame of his exploits had spread, often with a good deal of embroidery. He earned the nickname of "Nor'West Mackenzie", and visitors to the town were eager to make his acquaintance. Sometime during his residence in Montreal he built himself a fine house in Simpson Street, afterwards occupied by Sir George Simpson. He entertained in an ample fashion. A young officer of Engineers named Landmann tells of a dinner given by Mackenzie and McGillivray, a fellow agent, in December, 1797. It began at four in the afternoon; after the meal was over some of the company retired: "We now began in right earnest and true Highland style, and by four o'clock in the morning the whole of us had arrived at such a degree of perfection that we could all give the war-

whoop as well as Mackenzie and McGillivray, we could all sing admirably, we could all drink like fishes." The war-whoop seems to have been a part of the ritual on all festive occasions of the North-Westerns. Landmann records another entertainment, of similar character, given at Lachine next spring by the same hosts on the departure of the canoes for Grand Portage; at its conclusion the whole company was prostrate on the floor. In 1800 a more sober traveller, John Maude, tells of dining with Mackenzie when there were no fewer than thirty persons at table.

Mackenzie's work as an agent gave him plenty to do. He describes the agents' functions as follows:

Their duty was to import the necessary goods from England, store them at their own expense at Montreal, get them made up into the articles suited to the trade, pack and forward them, and supply the cash that might be wanting for the outfits; for which they received, independent of the profit on their shares, a commission on the amount of the accounts, which they were obliged to make out annually, and keep the adventure of each year distinct.

Two of the agents spent their summers in attending the annual meeting at Grand Portage. Mackenzie was certainly there in 1797, 1798, and 1799, and probably in 1795 and 1796 as well. Twice he arranged for Landmann to be taken

west in the agents' canoe as far as the military post of St. Joseph's near Sault Ste. Marie, and Landmann has left a most vivid account of the route and the mode of travel. The agents journeyed in great state, with a picked crew, in a canoe which carried no freight and went at a much faster pace than the brigades which conveyed the trade goods and furs.

In 1797, while at Grand Portage, Mackenzie met the man who did more than anyone else to follow up his explorations—David Thompson. Thompson had just left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and had gone to Grand Portage to offer himself to the North West Company. He records his pleasure at the cordial reception given him by Mackenzie and McGillivray: "How very different the liberal and public spirit of this North West Company of Merchants of Canada from the mean, selfish policy of the Hudson's Bay Company styled Honourable." Next year they met again; when Thompson made a report of his surveys, Mackenzie "was pleased to say I had performed more in ten months than he expected could be done in two years." A zeal for accurate exploration such as Thompson's was sure of a warm welcome from Mackenzie. Thompson served the Company for many years with extraordinary industry and fidelity; though he made no single journey as important as either of Mackenzie's, he mapped accurately a vast unknown territory between the Great Lakes and the Pacific.

By 1798 the affairs of the Company were approaching a crisis. Though most of the old hands remained faithful, the opposition conducted since 1795 by Forsyth and Richardson was greatly strengthened by the addition of several partners from the North West Company who refused to continue in

the parent concern. Its greatest loss was Mackenzie himself, though he did not as yet join the opposition. At Grand Portage in 1799 he announced, at a stormy meeting of his partners, his decision to withdraw. A veteran trader wrote: "The old North West Company is all in the hands of McTavish Frobisher, and Mackenzie is out. The latter went off in a pet. The cause as far as I can learn was who should be the first—McTavish or Mackenzie, and as there could not be two Cæsars in Rome, one must remove." The wintering partners did their best to retain him, resolving unanimously, to McTavish's intense annoyance, that, since Mackenzie alone had their confidence, they could not dispense with his services. But he had plans of his own, and he refused to stay. He wanted to publish his journal and to push his grand design. He would consent no longer to remain in a position where he felt himself deprived of freedom.

He went that autumn to England. Before he left Canada he may have come to some arrangement with the opposition, for he wrote to Roderick McKenzie in January, 1800, from London, urging him to cut loose from the North West Company and to unite with him. This Roderick refused to do, as he had been appointed an agent in Mackenzie's own place; there seems in consequence to have been a quarrel between the cousins which lasted for some years. Mackenzie was back in Montreal in the summer of 1800, but he soon returned to England, and probably remained there until March, 1802, seeing his book through the press. In the preface he is at pains to explain the long delay in publication. This had been ascribed by Weld, an English visitor to Montreal in 1796, to a disagreement with "a noble lord high in the confidence of the government," and by others to

commercial secrecy. Mackenzie says that the delay was due simply to his busy life since 1794, together with his diffidence as an author, "being much better calculated to perform the voyages, arduous as they might be, than to write an account of them."

The book came out late in 1801, a large and handsome quarto volume of about 550 pages, illustrated by three admirable maps and a fine engraving of the author from a portrait by the famous artist Lawrence. The journal of the voyages is prefaced by a history of the fur-trade in the North-West which ranks as the chief contemporary authority on the subject. This consists of a brief narrative of the development of the North West Company, followed by an elaborate description of trading methods and of the routes used between Montreal and Fort Chipewyan; it ends with an account of the life of the Cree and Beaver Indians. Then comes the journal of the two voyages, recording events from day to day in a dry and matter-of-fact style for which he apologizes in the preface. It is not one of the great books of travel because it lacks literary distinction; but it is an admirably lucid and truthful explorer's log-book, which is all it professes to be.

It had an immediate success. It was well reviewed, usually at great length and without a critical note except on matters of style. It was, however, indicative of the prevalent ignorance in Great Britain that the *Edinburgh Review* should say that "this large volume will convey but little important information to the geographer, the naturalist, or the statesman." French and German translations were brought out within a few months, and three editions were printed in

the United States by the end of 1803. The French translation is said to have been made at the command of Napoleon as a guide-book for a possible invasion of Canada from Louisiana; Napoleon took a copy with him to St. Helena. The book soon brought distinction to its author: on February 10, 1802, he received from George III the well-deserved honour of knighthood.

While in England Mackenzie began to urge once more the extension of British influence to the Pacific coast. His journey had remained an isolated achievement; no one had followed it up, and in the interval American traders had secured control of the maritime fur-trade. He added a few pages at the end of his *Voyages* in which he stated his views in a general form. The mystery of the North-West Passage had been solved; "the non-existence of a practicable passage by sea, and the existence of one through the continent, are clearly proved." To make use of the land passage "the countenance and support of the British Government" are needed behind "an association of men of wealth to direct, with men of enterprise to act, in one common interest." Such an association could be created by a union between all the Canadian traders from Montreal and the Hudson's Bay Company. It could develop a system of river transport across the continent just, as the Russians had done across Siberia. The Hudson's Bay Company possesses a valuable charter and control of the Bay; the traders from Canada possess the experience and most of the trade on the spot, the charter notwithstanding. A union would be fair to both parties. If the Hudson's Bay Company is unwilling to join, the Government might compel it either to surrender its rights for a fair price, or at any rate to throw open the navigation of the Bay. The

new company, in return for its risks, should be granted a monopoly of trade on the coast. He ends on a prophetic note:

By opening this intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and forming regular establishments though the interior and at both extremes, as well as along the coasts and islands, the entire command of the fur-trade of North America might be obtained from latitude 48 North to the pole, except that portion of it which the Russians have in the Pacific. To this may be added the fishing in both seas and the markets of the four quarters of the globe.... Then would this country begin to be remunerated for the expenses it has sustained in discovering and surveying the coast of the Pacific Ocean, which is at present left to American adventurers who, without regularity or capital, or the desire of conciliating future confidence, look altogether to the interest of the moment.

The port of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia are an answer to that prophecy.

Mackenzie presented a more detailed scheme to Lord Hobart, the Colonial Secretary, in January, 1802. He says in this that some of the oldest members of the North West Company "are likely to prefer continuing on the beaten track," but that he will undertake to get the men in Canada

and the money in London for the new company if the government will support him. He wants the government to form "a supreme civil and military establishment" at Nootka on Vancouver Island, with two minor posts on the mainland. This, it should be noted, was in conflict with the terms of the Nootka Convention with Spain; but it was not an essential part of the design. Then the government should help to repeal or modify the rights of the East India and South Sea Companies which hindered British trade on the coast, and should force the Hudson's Bay Company to permit the use of the Bay for transit. The new company, to be called "The Fishery and Fur Company," with the support of the government and a monopoly of the Pacific trade, would soon realize the "great national object" of making British influence supreme on the coast.

Put briefly, what Mackenzie wanted was to make the Pacific coast British territory at once by effective occupation and to link it with Canada; he was seeking to create the means by which permanent occupation could be achieved. Private enterprise, he held, could not accomplish much without special privileges, to compensate for the special privileges of other bodies. A chartered company was the solution. If his plan had been accepted when it was first suggested, part of the coast would have become British territory many years before it did, and Canada would probably have included to-day the states of Oregon and Washington as well as British Columbia.

The government, however, was not disposed to meddle with ancient vested rights. It was suggested to Mackenzie that the first step ought to be the union of all the Montreal

interests. Going back to Canada in March, 1802, he made enquiries which convinced him that the North West Company could not be converted to any scheme so ambitious. Writing in October for Hobart's information, he said that the bitterness between the rival companies was intense, and he urged the government once more to set up a military establishment at Nootka so as to declare British sovereignty; he was afraid that other nations would get there first.

He was himself drawn at once into the vortex of conflict in the fur-trade. He threw his whole weight into the opposition to the North West Company, and he became head in 1802 of the rival association which had begun in 1795 and is generally known as the X Y Company. His vision of a powerful combine receded into the distance, and his whole energy was consumed, as it had been during his first years in the interior, in fighting strong rivals for a fair share of the trade. The North-West was exposed once more to all the evils which unrestricted competition produced in an area without a government. It was thrown into turmoil from end to end; the amount of liquor used in trade more than doubled; murder went unpunished; violence, bribery, and theft were everyday matters. McTavish answered Mackenzie by reorganizing the North West Company on stricter lines, and by pushing its operations into new fields—even into Hudson Bay. The two were worthy rivals, and neither, one may be sure, was over-scrupulous. Feeling was bitter in the extreme; in 1803 a member of the X Y Company wrote: "By last advices the grand crisis was considered as not being far distant, and we fervently pray that it may terminate in the ruin and disgrace of our unprincipled enemy."

In July, 1804, McTavish died suddenly; his death made possible a restoration of peace, and it was soon followed by a reconciliation and a merger of the two concerns which preserved the name of the North West Company and lasted until 1821. The contest undoubtedly did harm; but one may point out in Mackenzie's favour that he fought the North West Company only because he could not persuade it to adopt his far-sighted plans, and that McTavish was the chief sinner. In 1804 Mackenzie became once more a partner; he retained his partnership until his death, but the active management passed to others, of whom McGillivray was the chief. Mackenzie was now in a position of some detachment, with leisure on his hands for the first time in his life. Expansion to the Pacific was still his chief desire, and he was probably responsible in large measure for the extension of the trade of the North West Company across the Rockies.

Certainly the new North West Company was far more vigorous in expanding the area of its operations than had been the old concern under McTavish. At last others followed the trail which Mackenzie had blazed. Thompson, Fraser, Harmon, Henry, to name some of the leading figures, pushed through the mountain barriers and opened posts up and down the interior of British Columbia; new passes were discovered, new regions opened to trade. Soon Thompson and Fraser both reached the sea, Fraser in 1807 by the Fraser River, Thompson in 1811 by the Columbia. Probably these activities of the North West Company alone prevented the Pacific coast from becoming a part of the United States, even though the Company was still hampered by the restrictions which Mackenzie was labouring to remove. Lewis and Clark in 1805 crossed the continent for the American government

—a journey sometimes ignorantly referred to as the first transcontinental expedition; in 1811 Astor's Pacific Fur Company built a fort at the mouth of the Columbia. The North West Company's servants were the only representatives of Great Britain, and they gradually succeeded in occupying effectively a large region west of the Rockies. Mackenzie left the work of exploration to younger men, but behind the scenes, in Montreal and in London, he continued to strive for the full realization of what he called his "favourite project."

In 1804 he appeared for a short time in a new field. In August he was elected a member of the Assembly of Lower Canada for the county of Huntingdon, and he retained his seat until 1808. He did not feel that he was a success as a legislator. He wrote to Roderick from Quebec while attending the session of 1805: "I am heartily tired of legislation. I sincerely wish that those who thought themselves my friends in being the means of getting me so honourable a situation had been otherwise employed." During the succeeding sessions he was frequently absent in England, and probably he did not again take his place in parliament.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST YEARS

At the end of 1805 Mackenzie seems to have determined to leave Canada. He had made a comfortable fortune, for the fur-trade had expanded enormously since his first venture twenty years before. On departing for England in November he wrote in farewell to Roderick: "Never mind the folly of the times; for my own part I am determined to make myself as comfortable as circumstances will allow. I have a large field before me. I do not leave Canada without regret." Though he returned to Canada once or twice, thereafter his home was on the other side of the Atlantic. The call of his native land was insistent.

From the lone shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us and the waste of seas,
But still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

The former emigrant boy could now afford to make his dreams come true; he went back to Scotland with fame and wealth achieved. In 1812 he married his kinswoman, Geddes Mackenzie, who brought him an estate in the Highlands, Avoch on Moray Firth in Ross-shire, at which he spent his last years.

At first he seems to have spent most of his time in London. He did not live in idleness; he was still a partner in the Company, and its most powerful representative in Great Britain; he still had another battle to fight. In 1808 he renewed his demand for the establishment of a chartered company on the coast. He had given up the idea, probably because he realized that it was hopeless of success, that the government should take a direct part by founding military

posts and formally establishing British sovereignty. Otherwise he repeated the features of his scheme of 1802. The Montreal interests were now united, and he asked for a charter for the North West Company giving them the same powers on the Pacific that the Hudson's Bay Company possessed on the Bay. He pointed out that Lewis and Clark's expedition made action urgent, though his own journey gave the British the rights of prior discovery. This memorial suffered the fate of most applications to governments: for three years it wandered from department to department, and finally came to rest in some dusty pigeon-hole.

In 1811 the request for a charter was renewed with vigour by the Company itself, with Mackenzie as one of several signatories. The ideas were certainly his, and probably a trip to Montreal in 1810 had been undertaken in connection with it. The application asked for the grant of "the sole and exclusive trade and commerce" of the Pacific coast and the basin of the Mackenzie River, urging the great services to the British Crown already performed by the Company, and pointing out that trade on the coast required so much capital, and was attended with such risk, that a monopoly was a fair reward for enterprise in that quarter. The demand, indeed, was far from unreasonable. Astor's company was established at the mouth of the Columbia and could make use of the Chinese market; the North West Company had been offered tempting terms by Astor to join with him, to accept the sovereignty of the United States, and to get rid in this way of the disabilities attending trade by British subjects. It was fair that the Company, crippled by old monopolies, should in return receive special privileges. The application was several times repeated, and a pamphlet lauding the achievements of

the Company was printed in its support. No charter, however, resulted; the government balked at the grant of a monopoly, and the proposal dropped.

For some time Mackenzie had been following another line of approach. Even failing a charter, the union of the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company would create such a strong combination that his aims might be realized. The Hudson's Bay Company's shares were purchasable, and it was not flourishing. Mackenzie's new plan was to get control by buying a majority of the stock, and so to bring about a peaceful union. In 1804 Ellice, one of Mackenzie's partners, had offered to buy the whole concern, but the deal had not been completed. In 1808 Mackenzie began to purchase shares. He found a strange ally in the Earl of Selkirk; before the end of 1810 they had invested several thousand pounds on joint account. Both were dissatisfied with the management of the Hudson's Bay Company, and this led to their co-operation; their reasons for dissatisfaction, however, were not at all the same.

Selkirk's passion was the encouragement of emigration to relieve distress in the Highlands; he had already founded a successful settlement in Prince Edward Island and an unsuccessful one in Ontario; for some time his thoughts had been turning to the west, and he had formed the design of establishing an agricultural colony on the Red River in the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company. Mackenzie's interests were those of trade alone; he regarded the prairies as unfitted for agriculture because of their remoteness and the severity of the climate. He was not seeking profit for himself: he wished the North West Company to control the

Hudson's Bay Company, so that their rivalry would end and his dream be realized of a great combine reaching to the Pacific coast. Neither was selfish, but their points of view were not compatible. Both were imperious and strongly partisan, and it is no wonder that they soon quarrelled. To Mackenzie the North-West was a savage region capable of producing furs alone; to Selkirk it was a rich and unoccupied land crying for inhabitants. The two associates were soon bitter enemies, and all sense of proportion was lost. To Selkirk Mackenzie became a greedy trader seeking to keep half a continent as a range for wild animals; to Mackenzie and his allies Selkirk became a land speculator, a stock jobber, using his influence with the Hudson's Bay Company to secure a vast estate for himself without payment. It is hardly necessary to say that both views were quite untrue.

As soon as Mackenzie grew suspicious of Selkirk's plans he urged without avail the immediate purchase by the North West Company of all the stock of the Hudson's Bay Company which could be got. It would have been well for his partners if they had taken this advice, for Selkirk bought it instead and by 1811 had a controlling interest. In May, 1811, at a meeting of the General Court of the Company, Selkirk was granted an area of 116,000 square miles, a territory nearly as large as Great Britain and Ireland. Mackenzie and five other shareholders violently opposed the grant, and issued a lengthy protest. The leading North-Westerners in London notified their partners in Canada that the scheme was a threat to the existence of their Company, and advised resistance on the spot. Selkirk sent out his first party of colonists in the same year, with Miles Macdonell in command. In the letters to Selkirk which he wrote on the

way he refers time after time to Mackenzie's open opposition. While the party was collecting at Stornoway, a relative of Mackenzie, who was collector of customs, did all he could to hinder their departure, and another relative tried to break up the expedition by enlisting its men in the army. Macdonell thought that these actions were inspired from London. He wrote at one time: "Sir A—— has pledged himself so decidedly opposed to this project that he will try every means in his power to thwart it"; and he added later that Mackenzie had threatened him with the Assiniboine Indians.

These were petty tactics, unworthy of a man of Mackenzie's stature. Yet the North-Westerners need not be blamed for their opposition to Selkirk's colony. Selkirk had secured from the Hudson's Bay Company the legal ownership of a rich territory, including the best part of modern Manitoba, which lay athwart the North West Company's communications from Lake Superior to their western posts. It was the area from which they drew a large part of their supply of provisions, and it had been in their undisputed occupation for many years. Because a king of England in 1670, without knowing what he was doing, had given to the Hudson's Bay Company an empire in the new world, an empire which the Company had never been able or even anxious to develop, now, one hundred and forty years later, the North-Westerners, who had entered into that empire as successors to the French and had opened it for trade, were calmly told that they had no right to be there and that they must clear out when they were ordered to do so. A vote at a shareholders' meeting in London and a few strokes of the pen had made them aliens in their own territory. Were legal

quibbles and musty parchments to prevent them from holding what they had? Both parties prepared to fight; as the contest went on passions were aroused, and both parties used any means to attain their end.

One need not enter here into the course of the struggle. It was fought in the North-West and in the courts of Canada, and Mackenzie remained in Great Britain. In its length and fury it far exceeded the struggles of the past between rival Canadian traders. Its scope was soon extended beyond the issue of the foundation of a colony on the Red River; the Hudson's Bay Company began to compete in the whole area of the fur-trade east of the Rockies, building posts wherever the North West Company was established. The contest flamed at times into open war, and the tale of atrocities, of murder, violence, arson, and pillage, is long. Probably the sins of the North-Westerners were the greater, for they were more powerful than their rivals, and they commanded the loyalty of most of the half-breeds and Indians. Selkirk himself was much more scrupulous than were his enemies.

Mackenzie, without taking a leading part, remained throughout a partisan of the North-Westerners. In 1816 Selkirk published in London in support of his claims a small book called *A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America*, which contained a bitter attack on the North West Company. The North-Westerners replied in 1817 with *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America*. In the preface the author states: "Sir Alexander Mackenzie, to whose authority Lord Selkirk so often appeals and whom he so often misrepresents, was desirous of taking up the discussion, an intention the execution of which

circumstances alone have hitherto delayed." His health was failing, and he was dropping out of affairs. In 1819 he refers to himself as a "dormant partner" in the North West Company. In the same year he was in London, and there he was consulted by another remarkable figure in the history of Canadian exploration. Franklin writes in the preface to the story of his terrible first journey to the Arctic coast: "A short time before I left London I had the pleasure and advantage of an interview with the late Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who was one of the two persons who had visited the coast we were to explore. He afforded me, in the most open and kind manner, much valuable information and advice."

Mackenzie's last years, spent chiefly on his estate in the Highlands, seem to have been happy. He became interested in agriculture and in improving his property. He built a wall which still protects from the incursions of the sea the road from Avoch to Fortrose; and he showed that his enterprise had not deserted him by establishing a successful oyster-bed in a near-by bay. He urged his friends in Canada to follow his example of retiring to their native Scotland to enjoy old age in peace. Writing to Roderick McKenzie in 1819, he tells him that he has become, in obedience to doctor's orders, "a water drinker and milk sop", though "the great doctor Hamilton of Edinburgh" could give his ailment no more definite a name than "a shake of the constitution." In the same letter he shows a keen interest in the fur-trade and the struggle with the Hudson's Bay Company, protests at the concessions made to the United States in the boundary settlement of 1818 through the energy of "that crafty, cunning statesman Gallatin", and announces his intention of

retiring from the North West Company on the expiration of the existing agreement in 1822.

This intention he did not live to carry out. In March, 1820, as he was returning to Avoch from Edinburgh with his wife and children, he was suddenly taken ill on the road at a small hamlet in Perthshire. He died there the next morning (March 12), aged about sixty years. It was an end such as one who had dared sudden death many times would have desired. His body lies buried in the churchyard at Avoch. He left two infant sons and a daughter, and his widow survived him until 1860.

The story of Mackenzie's life is not complete without an epilogue. Less than a month after his death, Selkirk was also carried to his grave. The way was opened for reconciliation after a contest the latest phase of which had lasted nearly ten years. Suddenly the decision was announced, to the surprise and disgust of many of the North-Westerns, that the two companies were to be united and that the name of the Hudson's Bay Company was to be retained. The union was completed in March, 1821. The struggle had at last attracted the attention of the British government to north-western America; in December of the same year the united companies obtained a charter granting them a monopoly of trade with the Indians throughout the whole North-West and on the Pacific coast. Thus within twenty months of Mackenzie's death the great project was realized for which he had been working since 1794. Though he might not have approved of the details of the union with the Hudson's Bay Company, he would certainly have been enthusiastic about the general result. Nor were the consequences which he had

prophesied from such a union unrealized. The new company, under the masterful control of Sir George Simpson, ended the chaos in the North-West and established a measure of regular government. Above all, on the Pacific coast it soon began to gain ground against the Russians and Americans, and to make good the British claim to a large part of the ownerless territory. If Mackenzie had been heeded twenty years earlier, the Canadian boundary west of the Rockies would have been well to the south of the 49th parallel.

Though ample credit is usually given to Mackenzie for his courage and determination as an explorer, the consequences of his life's work have received less than their proper share of attention. The claim can be advanced with confidence that Mackenzie made possible the inclusion of British Columbia in Canada. Though the idea of a British dominion on the Pacific had been put forward at intervals ever since Drake had created his shadowy New Albion in the sixteenth century, Mackenzie first made its realization possible. By daring, without support or encouragement, to continue his quest for a passage by land across the continent through toil and danger to success, he linked the Pacific Coast with territories already in British possession before any rivals had occupied the field. By urging on his return the immense importance of following up his discoveries through the occupation of the coast by British subjects, he advocated clearly for the first time the grand design which has been fulfilled in the Dominion of Canada. By encouraging the North West Company, when he was its most influential member, to push westwards beyond the Rockies, he inspired the first faint accomplishment of that vision, in spite of the apathy of the government and the jealousy of rival interests.

By repeating, after numerous failures and rebuffs, his efforts to unite all the trading interests in the North-West in one strong concern, he helped, probably more than anyone else, to secure that result, and with it the effective occupation of modern British Columbia. To the laurels which he won as an explorer and fur-trader another wreath should be added in recognition of his statesmanship.

NOTE ON AUTHORITIES

The chief contemporary sources for Mackenzie's life are to be found in: (1) His own *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans* (London, 1801); this has been several times reprinted. (2) Roderick McKenzie's *Reminiscences*, in Volume I of L. R. Masson's *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest* (Quebec, 1889). (3) Correspondence, etc., printed in the Reports of the Canadian Archives for 1886, 1889, 1890, and especially 1892, and in Volume III of *The Simcoe Papers* (Toronto, 1925). (4) The narratives of certain travellers in Canada, particularly Col. Landmann's *Adventures and Recollections* (London, 1852), and I. Weld's *Travels* (London, 1799). (5) Certain of the many journals of the fur-traders, especially D. Thompson's *Narrative* (ed. Tyrrell, Toronto, 1916), and A. Henry's letters in Vol. XIX of the *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*. Most of these journals relate to a period after Mackenzie had left the North-West.

Of modern works the most valuable are the two volumes of L. R. Masson referred to above (a collection of contemporary materials with a long introduction), and G. C. Davidson's *The North West Company* (Berkeley, Cal., 1918), in which several of Mackenzie's papers are printed for the first time. A. G. Morice's *History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (London, 1906), and Chester Martin's *Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada* (Oxford, 1916) should also be mentioned. A brief biography, in the *Makers of Canada* series, by G. Bryce, contains some details derived from Mackenzie's descendants and not to be found elsewhere. The notices in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* are full of mistakes.

Numerous narratives of Mackenzie's travels have been published; the best is in L. J. Burpee's *Search for the Western Sea* (Toronto, 1908). The *Reports* of the Geological Survey of Canada for 1875-6, 1888-9, and especially 1876-7, are useful to illustrate his routes. G. M. Dawson's map in the *Report* for 1876-7 is essential for tracing Mackenzie's course from the Fraser to the sea. An able and convincing reconstruction of his course on the Pacific from Bella Coola to the Rock has been made by Captain R. P. Bishop in *Mackenzie's Rock* (Ottawa, Dept. of the Interior, 1925).

This narrative has been based on these and other printed sources. Captain Bishop has generously allowed me to use some material of his own, and has assisted me with maps and advice. I here express my thanks to him, and also to His Honour Judge Howay for sending me some information, alluded to in Chapter I, regarding the time of Mackenzie's arrival in Canada.

H. W.

[The end of *Sir Alexander Mackenzie--Explorer and Fur-Trader* by Humphrey Hume Wrong]