Charles Bert Reed

Masters of the Wilderness

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The most insistent fact in history is the struggle between man and Nature, or between man and man with Nature for the prize.

Everywhere the puny human forces have dashed themselves with gallant idealism or reckless enthusiasm against the obduracy of primeval things.

In America the effort has not been in vain nor devoid of dramatic interest. A myriad of industrial adventures have found success, and the papers herewith offered may possibly renew a flagging interest in the first phases of the comprehensive movement which now takes so conspicuous a part in our national life.

History and story, it is said, are both narratives, but while history is regarded merely as a record, story stimulates the imagination.

In truth history should stimulate more powerfully than fiction, for it concerns the ideals which have moved mankind. The greed of commerce, the greed of thought, the greed of faith, and the greed of love are alike masters of our destiny.

If kindling the mind is the mark of literary excellence, then it belongs to the historian, as to the novelist, to present his subject so that events will appear, not only in due order, but with appropriate values and the necessary climax.

This is particularly true in the narrative of inherently adventurous persons or peculiarly dramatic events. These lives or actions must be reinvested, if possible, not only with

the atmosphere of their time, but with those unconscious accessory features which are visible only to a sympathetic posterity. Neither the romantic nor the indifferent, the lavish nor the sordid can be overlooked without bald misrepresentation. Every chronicler, however veracious in intent, must pass his material through his own personality, be it colored or neutral. It is this which develops the human interest and keeps history in its rightful place as a branch of literature.

In reproducing these romantic episodes of our exploration era the writer believes that he has neither exaggerated the color nor distorted the facts of that intensely human period. He realizes that he is open to reproach for not keeping more closely to modern methods of historical presentation, but in adopting the light rather than the solemn style, he is convinced that this particular subject receives a not inappropriate dress, and that a page which can be read without fatigue need not necessarily be untruthful.

This new edition of the "Masters of the Wilderness" is made possible through the generosity of the Chicago Historical Society, and its extreme devotion to developments in the Mississippi valley. The opportunity is, therefore, grasped by the writer to express his appreciation to the Society and to add the subsidiary papers which are so vitally allied to the titular essay.

In compiling and arranging his material the author has used unsparingly every available source of information, both primary and secondary. Most of these works are mentioned in the appended bibliography, and to them the writer gladly

acknowledges his indebtedness. Thanks are also due to Miss Lillian Quealy who assisted with the manuscript, and to Miss Caroline M. McIlvaine for many courtesies.

C. B. R.

December, 1913

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A STUDY OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY FROM ITS ORIGIN TO MODERN TIMES

"I am the land that listens, I am the land that broods;
Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline waters and woods.
Long have I waited lonely, shunned as a thing accurst,
Monstrous, moody, pathetic, the last of the lands and the first;
Visioning camp-fires at twilight, sad with a longing forlorn,
Feeling my womb o'er-pregnant with the seed of cities unborn.
Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my sway,
And I wait for the men who will win me—and I will not be won in a day."

—Service, "The Law of the Yukon."

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The question of a Northwest Passage to India and the South Seas has stimulated the mind and kindled the imagination of mankind for four hundred years. From the very first a fascinating theory, it soon became a necessary obsession, for the fierce activities of the triumphant Turks rendered the usual routes to the Indies too perilous for commerce, and Christian nations, especially Holland and England, turned with intense eagerness to the solution of this problem. Defeated in the immediate object, their efforts nevertheless exercised an incalculable influence over the entire world. With the single exception of the cognate adventure, the search for the North Pole, it is probable that no other quest has added so immensely to those arts and industries which make for the promotion of science and the advancement of civilization. That such a passage actually existed has been recognized since the voyage of Sir Edward Parry in 1820 and the fact was confirmed by the expedition of McClure in 1857, yet the complete passage from sea to sea had never succeeded until the recent memorable voyage of Captain Amundsen in 1903-6. Among the earlier navigators who received the crown of immortality through their efforts to achieve this quest, none is more meritoriously conspicuous than Henry Hudson, who in 1607 hammered his way through the ice floes to 80° north latitude. Next he thought to break through on the south, and in 1609 he discovered and explored the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays, the harbor of New York, where he was

attacked by natives, and sailed up the Hudson River as far as the present site of Albany. But the lure of the Northern route was strong upon him, and in 1610 he undertook the voyage which was at the same time the source of his greatest renown and the cause of his dreary death.

Passing through Hudson Straits, he entered the Bay which also bears his name and guided his ship cautiously southward. Sustained by an indomitable spirit, he rose superior to many difficulties and dangers, and spent over a year exploring the harbors, inlets, and adjacent coasts of this great inland sea. On attempting the homeward passage, however, he found he had delayed too long, and his crew, already disaffected by reason of the long voyage and the many strange hardships, suddenly became enraged at Hudson on account of his irascible temper, and rose in mutiny on June 11, 1611. They put Hudson, his little son, and five others into a shallop with a small amount of ammunition and provisions and sailed away.

In the narrative of this expedition written by Abaccus Prickett, one of the mutineers who succeeded in reaching England after a wearisome and perilous voyage, it is told how the old man, with set features and flying gray locks, grimly made sail in pursuit of his ship until he was dropped below the horizon and never seen again.

We now know only too well the barriers which lie in the path of the Northwest Passage. Almost directly northeast of the mouth of the Fish River which Lieutenants Back and Simpson both found, there lies a vast mass of ice which can neither move toward Behring Strait on account of the shallow water, nor to Baffin Bay on account of the

narrowness and crookedness of the channels. We know also, from the reports of the Low expedition of 1903-4, that there are two open currents always flowing in the straits that lead to Hudson Bay; one along the northern shore inward and to the west, and one along the southern shore outward and eastward, bearing the raft ice of the Bay. These currents are so suitably disposed that by a slight change of course ships can navigate the straits and have the benefit of the current in either direction and sail with the ice floes rather than against them. We also know that Hudson Bay is simply a vast whirlpool 800 miles wide by 1,000 miles long which has been cut, grooved, and gouged out of the solid rock by those two powerful currents which bear in their puissant grasp the raft ice of the Arctic Sea, the ice of prehistoric ages.

Like a giant sand-blast these huge masses of ice have been whirled grinding and eroding around the Bay only to be disgorged through Hudson Straits upon the bosom of the broad Atlantic. Into this channel of rock, the Hudson Straits, 450 miles long, is jammed from the west, churned together and concentrated the area of an ice continent, and up this channel from the east runs a "tide-rip" thirty-five feet high. When the "tide-rip" and the ice meet there occurs what the old navigators of the Hudson's Bay Company called "the furious overfall."

With difficulty one resists the temptation to pursue this interesting subject farther, but this is not the story that we started to relate, it is merely the scene of its beginning.

Impressed by the reports which various navigators brought back from this region, a company was formed for

the purpose of exploiting the shores of the Bay and the wooded fastnesses of the interior. The company was organized originally at the instance of the French explorers, Radisson and his brother-in-law, Groseilliers, whose visit to the Hudson Bay country had revealed its boundless possibilities. Disappointed in enlisting an interest in the venture in Montreal, they applied to Sir George Carteret, who was then in America as a member of the Royal Commission appointed to settle a number of disputed questions between New York and New England.

It was through his influence that they met the King in 1666, but it was only after a long delay, and some say not without insistence on the part of Louise Querouaille, the King's mistress, who was also under deep obligations to Lord Arlington, that the charter was granted by Charles II in May, 1670. Quite early in the venture the promoters had obtained audience with Prince Rupert, who with historical fieriness entered enthusiastically into the undertaking and became the first Governor of the "Honorable Hudson's Bay Company." There is an uncontradicted story to the effect that the Prince received a lump sum of £10,000 for his interest and influence in securing the charter, but we much prefer to believe that his interest was engaged and his romantic mind inflamed by the adventurous nature of the project, rather than by monetary considerations. When the Prince died he was succeeded in the governorship by the Duke of York, the King's brother, who afterward resigned to become James II of England. The Duke indeed had been associated with the adventure from the beginning and the records show that his was the first name on the stock book,

while opposite the name on the credit side of the account it states: "By a share presented to him in the stock and adventure by the Governor and Company, £300." We learn that among the many subscribers to the stock were to be found the King's cousin, his brother, afterward King James, the Duke of Albemarle, General Monk, who was largely responsible for the restoration of Charles, Henry, Earl of Arlington, a member of the ruling cabal, and Anthony, Earl of Shaftsbury, the versatile minister of the King, all of whom became directors in the new undertaking.

In their application for a charter the Company had urged the desirability of such a corporation as they contemplated as a means of (1) continuing the search for the Northwest Passage, (2) that in the progress of trade with the nations the blessings of civilization and religion should be brought to the Indians, and finally (3) that settlements could be affected to the glory of the King. We shall learn in the course of the narrative how quickly the Company lost sight of these high aims in the pursuit of a less noble purpose. The right of the King to grant such an instrument may be seriously questioned, but there was apparently no doubt in his own mind, and without evident qualms of conscience the "Merry Monarch" disposed of an expanse equal to the United States, except Alaska, "To our dear and entirely beloved cousin Prince Rupert, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria, etc. (with the others), constituting the Governor and Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay." The charter states that the incorporators deserve the privileges because they "have at their own great cost and charges undertaken an expedition for Hudson's Bay in the