

Egerton Ryerson Young



*By Canoe and
Dog-Train*

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Several letters were handed into my study, where I sat at work among my books.

I was then pastor of a Church in the city of Hamilton. Showers of blessing had been descending upon us, and over a hundred and forty new members had but recently been received into the Church. I had availed myself of the Christmas holidays by getting married, and now was back again with my beloved, when these letters were handed in. With only one of them have we at present anything to do. As near as I can remember, it read as follows:—

“Mission Rooms, Toronto, 1868.

“Rev. Egerton R. Young.

“Dear Brother, — At a large and influential meeting of the Missionary Committee, held yesterday, it was unanimously decided to ask you to go as a missionary to the Indian tribes at Norway House, and in the North-West Territories north of Lake Winnipeg. An early answer signifying your acceptance of this will much oblige,

“Yours affectionately,

“E. Wood,

“L. Taylor.”

I read the letter, and then handed it, without comment, across the table to Mrs Young — the bride of but a few days — for her perusal. She read it over carefully, and then, after a quiet moment, as was quite natural, asked, “What does this mean?” “I can hardly tell,” I replied; “but it is evident that it means a good deal.”

“Have you volunteered to go as a missionary to that far-off land?” she asked.

“Why, no. Much as I love, and deeply interested as I have ever been in the missionary work of our Church, I have not made the first move in this direction. Years ago I used to think I would love to go to a foreign field, but lately, as the Lord has been so blessing us here in the home work, and has given us such a glorious revival, I should have thought it

like running away from duty to have volunteered for any other field."

"Well, here is this letter; what are you going to do about it?"

"That is just what I would like to know," was my answer.

"There is one thing we can do," she said quietly; and we bowed ourselves in prayer, and "spread the letter before the Lord," and asked for wisdom to guide us aright in this important matter which had so suddenly come upon us, and which, if carried out, would completely change all the plans and purposes which we, the young married couple, in all the joyousness of our honeymoon, had just been marking out. We earnestly prayed for Divine light and guidance to be so clearly revealed that we could not be mistaken as to our duty.

As we arose from our knees, I quietly said to Mrs Young, "Have you any impression on your mind as to our duty in this matter?"

Her eyes were suffused in tears, but the voice, though low, was firm, as she replied, "The call has come very unexpectedly, but I think it is from God, and we will go."

My Church and its kind officials strongly opposed my leaving them, especially at such a time as this, when, they said, so many new converts, through my instrumentality, had been brought into the Church.

I consulted my beloved ministerial brethren in the city, and with but one exception the reply was, "Remain at your present station, where God has so abundantly blessed your labours." The answer of the one brother who did not join in with the others has never been forgotten. As it may do

good, I will put it on record. When I showed him the letter, and asked what I should do in reference to it, he, much to my surprise, became deeply agitated, and wept like a child. When he could control his emotions, he said, "For my answer let me give you a little of my history.

"Years ago, I was very happily situated in the ministry in the Old Land. I loved my work, my home, and my wife passionately. I had the confidence and esteem of my people, and thought I was as happy as I could be this side (of) heaven. One day there came a letter from the Wesleyan Mission Rooms in London, asking if I would go out as a missionary to the West Indies. Without consideration, and without making it a matter of prayer, I at once sent back a positive refusal.

"From that day," he continued, "everything went wrong with me. Heaven's smile seemed to have left me. I lost my grip upon my people. My influence for good over them left me, I could not tell how. My once happy home was blasted, and in all my trouble I got no sympathy from my Church or in the community. I had to resign my position, and leave the place. I fell into darkness, and lost my hold upon God. A few years ago I came out to this country. God has restored me to the light of His countenance. The Church has been very sympathetic and indulgent. For years I have been permitted to labour in her fold, and for this I rejoice. But," he added, with emphasis, "I long ago came to the resolve that if ever the Church asked me to go to the West Indies, or to any other Mission field, I would be careful about sending back an abrupt refusal."

I pondered over his words and his experience, and talked about them with my good wife, and we decided to go. Our loving friends were startled at our resolve, but soon gave us their benedictions, united to tangible evidences of their regard. A blessed peace filled our souls, and we longed to be away and at work in the new field which had so suddenly opened before us.

“Yes, we will go. We may no longer doubt
To give up friends, and home, and every tie,
That binds our heart to thee, our country.
Henceforth, then,
It matters not if storms or sunshine be
Our earthly lot, bitter or sweet our cup.
We only pray, God fit us for the work,
God make us holy, and our spirits nerve
For the stern hour of strife. Let us but know
There is an Arm unseen that holds us up,
An Eye that kindly watches all our path,
Till we our weary pilgrimage have done.
Let us but know we have a Friend that waits
To welcome us to glory, and we joy
To tread that drear and northern wilderness.”

The grand valedictory services were held in the old Richmond Street Church, Toronto, Thursday, May 7th, 1868. The church was crowded, and the enthusiasm was very great. The honoured President of the Conference for that year, the Rev. James Elliott, who presided, was the one who had ordained me a few months before. Many were the speakers. Among them was the Rev. George McDougall, who

already had had a varied experience of missionary life. He had something to talk about, to which it was worth listening. The Rev. George Young, also, had much that was interesting to say, as he was there bidding farewell to his own Church and to the people, of whom he had long been the beloved pastor. Dr. Punshon, who had just arrived from England, was present, and gave one of his inimitable magnetic addresses. The memory of his loving, cheering words abode with us for many a day.

It was also a great joy to us that my honoured father, the Rev. William Young, was with us on the platform at this impressive farewell service. For many years he had been one of that heroic band of pioneer ministers in Canada who had laid so grandly and well the foundations of the Church which, with others, had contributed so much to the spiritual development of the country. His benedictions and blessings were among the prized favours in these eventful hours in our new career.

My father had been intimately acquainted with William Case and James Evans, and at times had been partially associated with them in Indian evangelisation. He had faith in the power of the Gospel to save even Indians, and now rejoiced that he had a son and daughter who had consecrated themselves to this work.

As a long journey of many hundreds of miles would have to be made by us after getting beyond cars or steamboats in the Western States, it was decided that we should take our own horses and canvas-covered waggons from Ontario with us. We arranged to make Hamilton our starting-point; and on Monday, the 11th of May, 1868, our little company

filed out of that city towards St. Catherine's, where we were to take passage in a "propeller" for Milwaukee. Thus our adventurous journey was begun.

The following was our party. First, the Rev. George McDougall, who for years had been successfully doing the work of a faithful missionary among the Indians in the distant Saskatchewan country, a thousand miles north-west of the Red River country. He had come down to Canada for reinforcements for the work, and had not failed in his efforts to secure them. As he was an old, experienced Western traveller, he was the guide of the party.

Next was the Rev. George Young, with his wife and son. Dr. Young had consented to go and begin the work in the Red River Settlement, a place where Methodism had never before had a footing. Grandly and well did he succeed in his efforts.

Next came the genial Rev. Peter Campbell, who, with his brave wife and two little girls, relinquished a pleasant Circuit to go to the distant Mission field among the Indians of the North-West prairies. We had also with us two Messrs. Snyders, brothers of Mrs Campbell, who had consecrated themselves to the work as teachers among the distant Indian tribes. Several other young men were in our party, and in Dakota we were joined by "Joe" and "Job," a couple of young Indians.

These, with the writer and his wife, constituted our party of fifteen or twenty. At St. Catherine's on the Welland Canal we shipped our outfit, and took passage on board the steamer *Empire* for Milwaukee.

The vessel was very much crowded, and there was a good deal of discomfort. In passing through Lake Michigan we encountered rough weather, and, as a natural result, sea-sickness assailed the great majority of our party.

We reached Milwaukee on Sabbath, the 17th of May. We found it then a lively, wide-awake Americo-German city. There did not seem to be, on the part of the multitudes whom we met, much respect for the Sabbath. Business was in full blast in many of the streets, and there were but few evidences that it was the day of rest. Doubtless there were many who had not defiled their garments and had not profaned the day, but we weary travellers had not then time to find them out.

Although we had taken the precaution to bond everything through to the North-West, and had the American Consular certificate to the effect that every regulation had been complied with, we were subjected to many vexatious delays and expenses by the Custom House officials. So delayed were we that we had to telegraph to head-quarters at Washington about the matter and soon there came the orders to the over-officious officials to at once allow us to proceed. Two valuable days, however, had been lost by their obstructiveness. Why cannot Canada and the United States, lying side by side, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, devise some mutually advantageous scheme of reciprocity, by which the vexatious delays and annoyances and expense of these Custom Houses can be done away with?

We left Milwaukee for La Crosse on the Mississippi on Tuesday evening at eight o'clock. At La Crosse we embarked

on the steamer *Milwaukee* for St. Paul's. These large flat-bottomed steamers are quite an institution on these western rivers. Drawing but a few inches of water, they glide over sandbars where the water is very shallow, and, swinging in against the shore, land and receive passengers and freight where wharves are unknown, or where, if they existed, they would be liable to be swept away in the great spring freshets.

The scenery in many places along the upper Mississippi is very fine. High bold bluffs rise up in wondrous variety and picturesque beauty. In some places they are composed of naked rock. Others are covered to their very summit with the richest green. Here, a few years ago, the war-whoop of the Indians sounded, and the buffalo swarmed around these Buttes, and quenched their thirst in these waters. Now the shrill whistle of the steamer disturbs the solitudes, and echoes and re-echoes with wondrous distinctness among the high bluffs and fertile vales.

“Westward the Star of Empire takes its way.”

We arrived at St. Paul's on Thursday forenoon and found it to be a stirring city, beautifully situated on the eastern side of the Mississippi. We had several hours of good hard work in getting our caravan in order, purchasing supplies, and making all final arrangements for the long journey that was before us. For beyond this the iron horse had not yet penetrated, and the great surging waves of immigration,

which soon after rolled over into those fertile territories, had as yet been only little ripples.

Our splendid horses, which had been cooped up in the holds of vessels, or cramped up in uncomfortable freight cars, were now to have an opportunity for exercising their limbs, and showing of what mettle they were made. At 4 p.m. we filed out of the city. The recollection of that first ride on the prairie will live on as long as memory holds her throne. The day was one of those gloriously perfect ones that are but rarely given us, as if to show what earth must have been before the Fall. The sky, the air, the landscape — everything seemed in such harmony and so perfect, that involuntarily I exclaimed, “If God's footstool is so glorious, what will the throne be?”

We journeyed a few miles, then encamped for the night. We were all in the best of spirits, and seemed to rejoice that we were getting away from civilisation, and more and more out into the wilderness, although for days we were in the vicinity of frontier villages and settlements, which, however, as we journeyed on, were rapidly diminishing in number.

After several days' travelling we encamped on the western side of the Mississippi, near where the thriving town of Clear Water now stands. As some of our carts and travelling equipage had begun to show signs of weakness, it was thought prudent to give everything a thorough overhauling ere we pushed out from this point, as beyond this there was no place where assistance could be obtained. We had in our encampment eight tents, fourteen horses, and from fifteen to twenty persons, counting big and little, whites and Indians. Whenever we camped our horses were

turned loose in the luxuriant prairie grass, the only precaution taken being to “hobble” them, as the work of tying their forefeet together is called. It seemed a little cruel at first, and some of our spirited horses resented it, and struggled a good deal against it as an infringement on their liberties. But they soon became used to it, and it served the good purpose we had in view — namely, that of keeping them from straying far away from the camp during the night.

At one place, where we were obliged to stop for a few days to repair broken axle-trees, I passed through an adventure that will not soon be forgotten. Some friendly settlers came to our camp, and gave us the unpleasant information, that a number of notorious horse-thieves were prowling around, and it would be advisable for us to keep a sharp look-out on our splendid Canadian horses. As there was an isolated barn about half a mile or so from the camp, that had been put up by a settler who would not require it until harvest, we obtained permission to use it as a place in which to keep our horses during the nights while we were detained in the settlement. Two of our party were detailed each night to act as a guard. One evening, as Dr. Young's son George and I, who had been selected for this duty, were about starting from the camp for our post, I overheard our old veteran guide, the Rev. George McDougall, say, in a bantering sort of way, “Pretty guards they are! Why, some of my Indian boys could go and steal every horse from them without the slightest trouble.”

Stung to the quick by the remark, I replied, “Mr McDougall, I think I have the best horse in the company; but

if you or any of your Indians can steal him out of that barn between sundown and sunrise, you may keep him!"

We tethered the horses in a line, and fastened securely all the doors but the large front one. We arranged our seats where we were partially concealed, but where we could see our horses, and could command every door with our rifles. In quiet tones we chatted about various things, until about one o'clock, when all became hushed and still. The novelty of the situation impressed me, and, sitting there in the darkness, I could not help contrasting my present position with the one I had occupied a few weeks before. Then the pastor of a city Church, in the midst of a blessed revival, surrounded by all the comforts of civilisation; now out here in Minnesota, in this barn, sitting on a bundle of prairie grass through the long hours of night with a breech-loading rifle in hand, guarding a number of horses from a band of horse-thieves.

"Hush! what is that?"

A hand is surely on the door feeling for the wooden latch. We mentally say, "You have made too much noise, Mr Thief, for your purpose, and you are discovered." Soon the door opened a little. As it was a beautiful starlight night, the form of a tall man was plainly visible in the opening. Covering him with my rifle, and about to fire, quick as a flash came the thought, "Better be sure that that man is a horse-thief, or is intent on evil, ere you fire; for it is at any time a serious thing to send a soul so suddenly into eternity." So keeping my rifle to my shoulder, I shouted out, "Who's there?"

"Why, it's only your friend Matthew," said our tall friend, as he came stumbling along in the darkness; "queer if you

don't know me by this time.”

As the thought came to me of how near I had been to sending him into the other world, a strange feeling of faintness came over me, and, flinging my rifle from me, I sank back trembling like a leaf.

Meanwhile the good-natured fellow, little knowing the risk he had run, and not seeing the effect his thoughtless action had produced on me, talked on, saying that as it was so hot and close over at the tents that he could not sleep there, he thought he would come over and stop with us in the barn.

There was considerable excitement, and some strong words were uttered at the camp next morning at his breach of orders and narrow escape, since instructions had been given to all that none should, under any consideration, go near the barn while it was being guarded.

At another place in Minnesota we came across a party who were restoring their homes, and “building up their waste places” desolated by the terrible Sioux wars of but a short time before. As they had nearly all of them suffered by that fearful struggle, they were very bitter in their feelings towards the Indians, completely ignoring the fact that the whites were to blame for that last sanguinary outbreak, in which nine hundred lives were lost, and a section of country larger than some of the New England States was laid desolate. It is now an undisputed fact that the greed and dishonesty of the Indian agents of the United States caused that terrible war of 1863. The principal agent received \$600,000 in gold from the Government, which belonged to the Indians, and was to be paid to Little Crow and the other

chiefs and members of the tribe. The agent took advantage of the premium on gold, which in those days was very high, and exchanged the gold for greenbacks, and with these paid the Indians, putting the enormous difference in his own pocket. When the payments began, Little Crow, who knew what he had a right to according to the Treaty, said, "Gold dollars worth more than paper dollars. You pay us gold." The agent refused, and the war followed. This is only one instance out of scores, in which the greed and selfishness of a few have plunged the country into war, causing the loss of hundreds of lives and millions of treasure.

In addition to this, these same unprincipled agents, with their hired accomplices and subsidised press, in order to hide the enormity of their crimes, and to divert attention from themselves and their crookedness, systematically and incessantly misrepresent and vilify the Indian character.

"Stay and be our minister," said some of these settlers to me in one place. "We'll secure for you a good location, and will help you get in some crops, and will do the best we can to make you comfortable."

When they saw we were all proof against their appeals, they changed their tactics, and one exclaimed, "You'll never get through the Indian country north with those fine horses and all that fine truck you have."

"O yes, we will," said Mr McDougall; "we have a little flag that will carry us in safety through any Indian tribe in America."

They doubted the assertion very much, but we found it to be literally true, at all events as regarded the Sioux; for when, a few days later, we met them, our Union Jack

fluttering from the whip-stalk caused them to fling their guns in the grass, and come crowding round us with extended hands, saying, through those who understood their language, that they were glad to see and shake hands with the subjects of the "Great Mother" across the waters.

When we, in our journey north, reached their country, and saw them coming down upon us, at Mr McDougall's orders we stowed away our rifles and revolvers inside of our waggon, and met them as friends, unarmed and fearless. They smoked the pipe of peace with those of our party who could use the weed, and others drank tea with the rest of us. As we were in profound ignorance of their language, and they of ours, some of us had not much conversation with them beyond what could be carried on by a few signs. But, through Mr McDougall and our own Indians, they assured us of their friendship.

We pitched our tents, hobbled our horses and turned them loose, as usual. We cooked our evening meals, said our prayers, unrolled our camp-beds, and lay down to rest without earthly sentinels or guards around us, although the camp-fires of these so-called "treacherous and bloodthirsty" Sioux could be seen in the distance, and we knew their sharp eyes were upon us. Yet we lay down and slept in peace, and arose in safety. Nothing was disturbed or stolen.

So much for a clean record of honourable dealing with a people who, while quick to resent when provoked, are mindful of kindnesses received, and are as faithful to their promises and treaty obligations, as are any other of the races of the world.

We were thirty days in making the trip from St. Paul's to the Red River settlement. We had to ford a large number of bridgeless streams. Some of them took us three or four days to get our whole party across. We not unfrequently had some of our waggons stuck in the quicksands, or so sunk in the quagmires that the combined strength of all the men of our party was required to get them out. Often the ladies of our company, with shoes and stockings off, would be seen bravely wading across wide streams, where now in luxurious comfort, in parlour cars, travellers are whirled along at the rate of forty miles an hour. They were a cheerful, brave band of pioneers.

The weather, on the whole, was pleasant, but we had some drenching rain-storms; and then the spirits of some of the party went down, and they wondered whatever possessed them to leave their happy homes for such exile and wretchedness as this. There was one fearful, tornado-like storm that assailed us when we were encamped for the night on the western bank of Red River. Tents were instantly blown down. Heavy waggons were driven before it, and for a time confusion reigned supreme. Fortunately nobody was hurt, and most of the things blown away were recovered the next day.

Our Sabbaths were days of quiet rest and delightful communion with God. Together we worshipped Him Who dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Many were the precious communions we had with Him Who had been our Comforter and our Refuge under other circumstances, and Who, having now called us to this new work and novel life,

was sweetly fulfilling in us the blessed promise: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

Chapter Two. Still on the route — Fort Garry — Breaking up of our party of missionaries — Lower Fort — Hospitable Hudson's Bay officials — Peculiarities — Fourteen days in a little open boat on stormy Lake Winnipeg — Strange experiences — Happy Christian Indian boatmen — “In perils by waters.”

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At Fort Garry in the Red River settlement, now the flourishing city of Winnipeg, our party, which had so long travelled together, broke up with mutual regrets. The Rev. George Young and his family remained to commence the first Methodist Mission in that place. Many were his discouragements and difficulties, but glorious have been his successes. More to him than to any other man is due the prominent position which the Methodist Church now occupies in the North-West. His station was one calling for rare tact and ability. The Riel Rebellion, and the disaffection of the Half-breed population, made his position at times one of danger and insecurity; but he proved himself to be equal to every emergency. In addition to the many duties devolving upon him in the establishment of the Church amidst so many discordant elements, a great many extra cares were imposed upon him by the isolated missionaries in the interior, who looked to him for the purchasing and

sending out to them, as best he could, of their much-needed supplies. His kindly laborious efforts for their comfort can never be forgotten.

The Revs. George McDougall and Peter Campbell, with the teachers and other members of the party, pushed on, with their horses, waggons, and carts, for the still farther North-West, the great North Saskatchewan River, twelve hundred miles farther into the interior.

During the first part of their journey over the fertile but then unbroken prairies, the only inhabitants they met were the roving Indians and Half-breeds, whose rude wigwams and uncouth noisy carts have long since disappeared, and have been replaced by the comfortable habitations of energetic settlers, and the swiftly moving trains of the railroads.

From Fort Garry Mrs Young and myself performed the rest of our journey by water, going down the Red River to its mouth, and then along the whole length of the stormy Lake Winnipeg, and beyond, to our own far-off northern home. The trip was made in what is called "the Hudson's Bay inland boat." These boats are constructed like large skiffs, only each end is sharp. They have neither deck nor cabin. They are furnished with a mast and a large square sail, both of which are stowed away when the wind is not favourable for sailing. They are manned by six or eight oarsmen, and are supposed to carry about four tons of merchandise. They can stand a rough sea, and weather very severe gales, as we found out during our years of adventurous trips in them. When there is no favourable wind for sailing, the stalwart boatmen push out their heavy oars, and, bending their

sturdy backs to the work, and keeping the most perfect time, are often able to make their sixty miles a day. But this toiling at the oar is slavish work, and the favouring gale, even if it develops into a fierce storm, is always preferable to a dead calm. These northern Indians make capital sailors, and in the sudden squalls and fierce gales to which these great lakes are subject, they display much courage and judgment.

Our place in the boat was in the hinder part near the steersman, a pure Indian, whose name was Thomas Mamanowatum, familiarly known as "Big Tom," on account of his almost gigantic size. He was one of Nature's noblemen, a grand, true man, and of him we shall have more to say hereafter. Honoured indeed was the missionary who led such a man from Paganism to Christianity.

We journeyed on pleasantly for twenty miles down the Red River to Lower Fort Garry, where we found that we should have to wait for several days ere the outfit for the boats would be ready. We were, however, very courteously entertained by the Hudson's Bay officials, who showed us no little kindness.

This Lower Fort Garry, or "the Stone Fort," as it is called in the country, is an extensive affair, having a massive stone wall all around it, with the Company's buildings in the centre. It was built in stormy times, when rival trading parties existed, and hostile bands were ever on the war path. It is capable of resisting almost any force that could be brought against it, unaided by artillery. We were a little amused and very much pleased with the old-time and almost courtly etiquette which abounded at this and the

other establishments of this flourishing Company. In those days the law of precedents was in full force. When the bell rang, no clerk of fourteen years' standing would think of entering before one who had been fifteen years in the service, or of sitting above him at the table. Such a thing would have brought down upon him the severe reproof of the senior officer in charge. Irksome and even frivolous as some of these laws seemed, doubtless they served a good purpose, and prevented many misunderstandings which might have occurred.

Another singular custom, which we did not like, was the fact that there were two dining-rooms in these establishments, one for the ladies, and the other for the gentlemen of the service. It appeared to us very odd to see the gentlemen with the greatest politeness escort the ladies into the hall which ran between the two dining-rooms, and then gravely turn to the left, while the ladies all filed off into the room on the right. As the arrangement was so contrary to all our ideas and education on the subject, we presumed to question it; but the only satisfaction we could get in reference to it was, that it was one of their old customs, and had worked well. One old crusty bachelor official said, "We do not want the women around us when we are discussing our business matters, which we wish to keep to ourselves. If they were present, all our schemes and plans would soon be known to all, and our trade might be much injured."

Throughout this vast country, until very lately, the adventurous traveller, whose courage or curiosity was sufficient to enable him to brave the hardships or run the risks of exploring these enormous territories, was entirely