

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
Baum Leslie Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac Crane
Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Verne
Burroughs Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Curtis Homer Tolstoy Thoreau Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Cooke
Harte
Poe Aristotle Wells Burton Hesse
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
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**The Great Lone Land A Narrative
of Travel and Adventure in the
North-West of America**

William Francis Butler

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**The Great Lone Land showing the route of Captain W F Butler
F.R.G.S.**

PREFACE.

At York Factory on Hudson Bay there lived, not very long ago, a man who had stored away in his mind one fixed resolution it was to write a book.

"When I put down," he used to say, "all that I have seen, and all that I havn't seen, I will be able to write a good book."

It is probable that had this man carried his intention into effect the negative portion of his vision would have been more successful than the positive. People are generally more ready to believe what a man hasn't seen than what he has seen. So, at least, thought Karkakonias the Chippeway Chief at Pembina.

Karkakonias was taken to Washington during the great Southern War, in order that his native mind might be astonished by the grandeur of the United States, and by the strength and power of the army of the Potomac.

Upon his return to his tribe he remained silent and impassive; his days were spent in smoking, his evenings in quiet contemplation; he spoke not of his adventures in the land of the great white medicine-man. But at length the tribe grew discontented; they had expected to hear the recital of the wonders seen by their chief, and lo! he had come-back to them as silent as though his wanderings had ended on the Coteau of the Missouri, or by the borders of the Kitchi-Gami. Their discontent found vent in words.

"Our father, Karkakonias, has come back to us," they said; "why does he not tell his children of the medicine of the white man? Is our father dumb that he does not speak to us of these things?"

Then the old chief took his calumet from his lips, and replied, "If Karkakonias told his children of the medicines of the white man--of his war-canoes moving by fire, and making thunder as they move, of his warriors more numerous than the buffalo in the days of our fathers, of all the wonderful things he has looked upon--his children would point and say, Behold! Karkakonias has become in his old age a maker of lies! No, my children, Karkakonias has seen many wonderful things, and his tongue is still able to speak; but, until

your eyes have travelled as far as has his tongue, he will sit silent and smoke the calumet, thinking only of what he has looked upon."

Perhaps I too should have followed the example of the old Chippe-way chief, not because of any wonders I have looked upon; but rather because of that well-known prejudice against travellers tales, and of that terribly terse adjuration-"O that mine enemy might write a book!" Be that as it may, the book has been written; and it only remains to say a few words about its title and its theories.

The "Great Lone Land" is no sensational name. The North-west fulfils, at the present time, every essential of that title. There is no other portion of the globe in which travel is possible where loneliness can be said to live so thoroughly. One may wander 500 miles in a direct line without seeing a human being, or an animal larger than a wolf. And if vastness of plain, and magnitude of lake, mountain, and river can mark a land as great, then no region possesses higher claims to that distinction.

A word upon more personal matters. Some two months since I sent to the firm from whose hands this work has emanated a portion of the unfinished manuscript. I received in reply a communication to the effect that their Reader thought highly of my descriptions of real occurrences, but less of my theories. As it is possible that the general reader may fully endorse at least the latter portion of this opinion, I have only one observation to make.

Almost every page of this book has been written amid the ever-present pressure of those feelings which spring from a sense of unrequited labour, of toil and service theoretically and officially recognized, but practically and professionally denied. However, a personal preface is not my object, nor should these things find allusion here, save to account in some manner, if account be necessary, for peculiarities of language or opinion which may hereafter make themselves apparent to the reader. Let it be.

In the solitudes of the Great Lone Land, whither I am once more about to turn my steps, the trifles that spring from such disappointments will cease to trouble.

April 14th 1872.

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THE GREAT LONE LAND.

CHAPTER ONE.

Peace--Rumours of War--Retrenchment--A Cloud in the far West--A Distant Settlement--Personal--The Purchase System--A Cable-gram--Away to the West

IT was a period of universal peace over the wide world. There was not a shadow of war in the North, the South, the East, or the West. There was not even a Bashote in South Africa, a Beloochee in Scinde, a Bhoottea, a Burmese, or any other of the many "eses" or "eas" forming the great colonial empire of Britain who seemed capable of kicking up the semblance of a row. Newspapers had never been so dull; illustrated journals had to content themselves with pictorial representations of prize pigs, foundation stones, and provincial civic magnates. Some of the great powers were bent upon disarming; several influential persons of both sexes had decided, at a meeting held for the suppression of vice, to abolish standing armies. But, to be more precise as to the date of this epoch, it will be necessary to state that the time was the close of the year 1869, just twenty-two months ago. Looking back at this most-piping period of peace from the stand-point of today, it is not at all improbable that even at that tranquil moment a great power, now, very much greater, had a firm hold of certain wires carefully concealed; the dexterous pulling of which would cause 100,000,000 of men to rush at each other's throats: nor is this supposition rendered the more unlikely because of the utterance of the most religious sentiments on the part of the great power in question, and because of the well-known Christianity and orthodoxy of its ruler. But this was not the only power that possessed a deeper insight into the future than did its neighbours. It is hardly to be gainsaid that there was, about that period, another great power popularly supposed to dwell amidst darkness--a power which is said also to possess the faculty of making Scriptural quotations to his own advantage. It is not at all unlikely that amidst this scene of universal quietude he too was watching certain little snow-wrapt hamlets, scenes of straw-yard and deep thatched byre in which cattle munched their winter provender--watching them with the perspective scent of death and destruc-

tion in his nostrils; gloating over them with the knowledge of what was to be their fate before another snow time had come round. It could not be supposed that amidst such an era of tranquillity the army of England should have been allowed to remain in a very formidable position. When other powers were talking of disarming, was it not necessary that Great Britain should actually disarm? of course there was a slight difference existing between the respective cases, inasmuch as Great Britain had never armed; but that distinction was not taken into account, or was not deemed of sufficient importance to be noticed, except by a few of the opposition journals; and is not every one aware that when a country is governed on the principle of parties, the party which is called the opposition must be in the wrong? So it was decreed about this time that the fighting force of the British nation should be reduced. It was useless to speak of the chances of war, said the British tax-payer, speaking through the mouths of innumerable members of the British Legislature. Had not the late Prince Consort and the late Mr. Cobden come to the same conclusion from the widely different points of great exhibitions and free trade, that war could never be? And if; in the face of great exhibitions and universal free trade-even if war did become possible, had we not ambassadors, and legations, and consulates all over the world; had we not military attaches at every great court of Europe; and would we not know all about it long before it commenced? No, no, said the tax-payer, speaking through the same medium as before, reduce the army, put the ships of war out of commission, take your largest and most powerful transport steamships, fill them full with your best and most experienced skilled military and naval artisans and labourers, send them across the Atlantic to forge guns, anchors, and material of war in the navy-yards of Norfolk and the arsenals of Springfield and Rock Island; and let us hear no more of war or its alarms. It is true, there were some persons who thought otherwise upon this subject, but many of them were men whose views had become warped and deranged in such out-of-the-way places as Southern Russia, Eastern China, Central Hindoostan, Southern Africa, and Northern America military men, who, in fact, could not be expected to understand questions of grave political economy, astute matters of place.-and party, upon which the very existence of the parliamentary system depended; and who, from the ignorance of these nice distinctions of liberal-

conservative and conservative-liberal, had imagined that the strength and power of the empire was not of secondary importance to the strength and power of a party. But the year 1869 did not pass altogether into the bygone without giving a faint echo of disturbance in one far-away region of the earth. It is true, that not the smallest breathing of that strife which was to make: the succeeding year crimson through the centuries had yet sounded on the continent of Europe. No; all was as quiet there as befits the mighty hush which precedes colossal conflicts. But far away in the very farthest West, so far that not one man in fifty could tell its whereabouts, up somewhere between the Rocky Mountains, Hudson Bay, and Lake Superior, along a river called the Red River of the North, a people, of whom nobody could tell who or what they were, had risen in insurrection. Well-informed persons said these insurgents were only Indians; others, who had relations in America, averred that they were Scotchmen, and one journal, well-known for its clearness upon all subjects connected with the American Continent, asserted that they were Frenchmen. Amongst so much conflicting testimony, it was only natural that the average Englishman should possess no very decided opinions upon the matter; in fact, it came to pass that the average Englishman, having heard that somebody was rebelling against him somewhere or other, looked to his atlas and his journal for information on the subject, and having failed in obtaining any from either source, naturally concluded that the whole thing was something which no fellow could be expected to understand. As, however, they who follow the writer of these pages through such vicissitudes as he may encounter will have to live awhile amongst these people of the Red River of the North, it will be necessary to examine this little cloud of insurrection which the last days of 1869 pushed above the political horizon. Bookmark About the time when Napoleon was carrying half a million of men through the snows of Russia, a Scotch nobleman of somewhat eccentric habits conceived the idea of planting a colony of his countrymen in the very heart of the vast continent of North America. It was by no means an original idea that entered into the brain of Lord Selkirk; other British lords had tried in earlier centuries the same experiment; and they, in turn, were only the imitators of those great Spanish nobles who, in the sixteenth century, had planted on the coast of the Carolinas and along the Gulf of Mexico the first germs of colonization in the New

World. But in one respect Lord Selkirk's experiment was wholly different from those that had preceded it. The earlier adventurers had sought the coast-line of the Atlantic upon which to fix their infant colonies. He boldly penetrated into the very centre of the continent and reached a fertile spot which to this day is most difficult of access. But at that time what an oasis in the vast wilderness of America was this Red River of the North! For 1400 miles between it and the Atlantic lay the solitudes that now teem with the cities of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. Indeed, so distant appeared the nearest outpost of civilization towards the Atlantic that all means of communication in that direction was utterly unthought of. The settlers had entered into the new land by the ice-locked bay of Hudson, and all communication with the outside world should be maintained through the same outlet. No easy task! 300 miles of lake and 400 miles of river, wildly foaming over rocky ledges in its descent of 700 feet, lay between them and the ocean, and then only to reach the stormy waters of the great Bay of Hudson, whose ice-bound outlet to the Atlantic is fast locked save during two short months of latest summer. No wonder that the infant colony had hard times in store for it—hard times, if left to fight its way against winter rigour and summer: inundation, but doubly hard when the hand of a powerful enemy was raised to crush it in the first year of its existence. Of this more before we part. Enough for us now to know: that the little colony, in spite of opposition, increased and multiplied; people lived in it, were married in it, and died in it, undisturbed by the busy rush of the outside world, until, in the last months of 1869, just fifty-seven years after its formation, it rose in insurrection.

And now, my reader, gentle or cruel, whichever you may be, the positions we have hitherto occupied in these few preliminary pages must undergo some slight variation. You, if you be gentle, will I trust remain so until the end; if you be cruel, you will perhaps relent; but for me, it will be necessary to come forth in the full glory of the individual "I," and to retain it until we part.

It was about the end of the year 1869 that I became conscious of having experienced a decided check in life. One day I received from a distinguished military functionary an intimation to the effect that a company in Her Majesty's service would be at my disposal, pro-

vided I could produce the sum of 1100 pounds. Some dozen years previous to the date of this letter I entered the British army, and by the slow process of existence had reached-a position among the subalterns of the regiment technically known as first for purchase; but now, when the moment arrived to turn that position to account, I found that neither the 1100 pounds of regulation amount nor the 400 pounds of over-regulation items (terms very familiar now, but soon, I trust, to be for ever obsolete) were forthcoming, and so it came about that younger hands began to pass me in the race of life. What was to be done? What course lay open? Serve on; let the dull routine of barrack-life grow duller; go from Canada to the Cape, from the Cape to the Mauritius, from Mauritius to Madras, from Madras goodness knows where, and trust to delirium tremens, yellow fever, or: cholera morbus for promotion and advancement; or, on the other hand, cut the service, become in the lapse of time governor of a penitentiary, secretary to a London club, or adjutant of militia. And yet-here came the rub-when every fibre of one's existence beat in unison with the true spirit of military adventure, when the old feeling which in boyhood had made the study of history a delightful pastime, in late years had grown into a fixed unalterable longing for active service, when the whole current of thought ran in the direction of adventure-no matter in what climate, or under what circumstances-it was hard beyond the measure of words to sever in an instant the link that bound one to a life where such aspirations were still possible of fulfilment; to separate one's destiny for ever from that noble profession of arms; to become an outsider, to admit that the twelve best years of life had been a useless dream, and to bury oneself far away in some Western wilderness out of the reach or sight of red coat or sound of bugle-sights and sounds which old associations would have made unbearable. Surely it could not be done; and so, looking abroad into the future, it was difficult to trace a path Which could turn the flank of this formidable barrier flung thus suddenly into the highway of life.

Thus it was that one, at least, in Great Britain watched with anxious gaze this small speck of revolt rising so far away in the vast wilderness of the North-West; and when, about the beginning of the month of April, 1870, news came of the projected despatch of an armed force from Canada against the malcontents of Red River,

there was one who beheld in the approaching expedition the chance of a solution to the difficulties which had beset him in his career. That one was myself.

There was little time to be lost, for already; the cable said, the arrangements were in a forward state; the staff of the little force had been organized, the rough outline of the expedition had been sketched, and with the opening of navigation on the northern lakes the first move would be commenced. Going one morning to the nearest telegraph station, I sent the following message under the Atlantic to America:—"To: Winnipeg Expedition. Please remember me." When words cost at the rate of four shillings each, conversation and correspondence become of necessity limited. In the present instance I was only allowed the use of ten words to convey address, signature, and substance, and the five words of my message were framed both with a view to economy and politeness, as well as in a manner which by calling for no direct answer still left undecided the great question of success. Having despatched my message under the ocean, I determined to seek the Horse Guards in a final effort to procure unattached promotion in the army. It is almost unnecessary to remark that this attempt failed; and as I issued from the audience in which I had been informed of the utter hopelessness of my request, I had at least the satisfaction of having reduced my chances of fortune to the narrow limits of a single throw. Pausing at the gate of the Horse Guards I reviewed in a moment the whole situation; whatever was to be the result there was no time for delay and so, hailing a hansom, I told the cabby to drive to the office of the Cunard Steamship Company, Old Broad Street, City.

"What steamer sails on Wednesday for America?"

"The 'Samaria for Boston, the 'Marathon for New York."

"The 'Samaria broke her shaft, didn't she, last voyage, and was a missing ship for a month?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the clerk.

"Then book me a passage in her," I replied; "she's not likely to play that prank twice in two voyages."