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International Buying Trip

FORT GARRY TO ST. LOUIS IN 1846

ELAINE ALLAN MITCHELL

IN THE SUMMER of 1846 the need arose in the Red River Settlement for more supplies than would reach the colony via Hudson Bay and York Factory on the Hudson’s Bay Company’s annual ships from England. When it became known that British troops would arrive in the autumn and would have to be fed, those ships had already sailed, and the company was quick to turn for additional provisions to St. Louis, the nearest possible market. The spread of settlement northward on the Mississippi during the 1840s and, more especially, the establishment of Norman W. Kittson’s American post at Pembina in 1844 had created problems for the company. Thereafter, despite its exclusive charter, which gave it a monopoly of trade in Rupert’s Land, the company had been powerless to prevent the development of a regular traffic in goods (except furs) over the Red River trails between Fort Garry and the new villages of St. Peter’s, or Mendota, and St. Paul. Thus the route southward through the Minnesota country was not unfamiliar in 1846, when Robert Clouston led the company expedition from Fort Garry to St. Louis to purchase the supplies needed in the Red River Settlement.

At the age of seventeen, in June, 1838, Clouston entered the company’s service at Stromness in Orkney as a clerk, and then left his native islands to go out to York Factory on the annual ship. After being stationed at Norway House, on the Saskatchewan, and at Oxford House, he went in the fall of 1842 to Red River, where he

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remained until 1848. He was appointed clerk in charge of Lower Fort Garry, nineteen miles north of the upper fort on the present site of Winnipeg, in June, 1846, and on July 30 of that year, under orders from Sir George Simpson, governor of Rupert's Land, he left Upper Fort Garry for St. Peter's and St. Louis on a round trip that occupied more than three months. The narrative here presented is based on Clouston's full account of his adventures, which he wrote for his mother and sent to Stromness.¹

Selected to accompany Clouston on the journey as second in command was John P. Bourke, a much older officer who was in charge of the post the company had established in 1845 at Pembina for defense against American traders. Governor Simpson ordered the two men to purchase in St. Louis two hundred and forty “pieces” of goods, each weighing about ninety pounds and consisting of tea, sugar, and other supplies, which were to be transported to St. Peter’s by water. There the goods would be transferred to thirty Red River carts, each of which would carry eight pieces. A contract for the vehicles was made at Red River before Clouston’s party left, and it was arranged that they should set out for St. Peter’s a few days after his departure.

Transportation from the latter place to Red River by cart was to cost the company twenty shillings, or 84.83, per piece; Simpson provided Clouston and Bourke with letters of introduction to the commander of the garrison at Fort Snelling, to Henry H. Sibley at St. Peter’s, and to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company and Kenneth McKenzie of St. Louis.²

³Since the length of Clouston’s original narrative precludes its publication in full, this summary, with extracts, has been prepared with a view to the special interests of Minnesota readers. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy of the complete manuscript, which was preserved in the family of Clouston’s sister. Her granddaughter, the late Mrs. Rosalind Pelly of Witham Lodge, Essex, England, made the original available to the present author. Mrs. Pelly also placed at the writer’s disposal an account which Clouston prepared in 1855 describing his life from 1838 to 1851 in Rupert’s Land, the vast area of the British Northwest granted to the Hudson’s Bay Company by charter in 1670. The latter narrative will be cited as Clouston’s manuscript of 1855. In quoting from both manuscripts, punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization have been modified in the interest of readability.

¹Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, D.4/35, fo. 40d.

²Copies of the four letters of introduction are in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, D.4/35, fos. 41-42. Both the Fort Snelling commandant and Sibley, the trader in charge at St. Peter’s, seem to have been strangers to Simpson. McKenzie was a prominent trader on the upper Missouri, and the Chouteau concern took over the affairs of the American Fur Company at St. Louis after the latter failed in 1843.
THE PARTY, consisting of the two officers and two men—doubtless Red River half-breeds—with seven horses and a cart to carry their baggage, set out over what came to be known later as the woods trail to St. Peter's. The physical hardships of a wilderness journey left Clouston little time for the romantic outpourings in his diary which in his time were considered the mark of the elegant traveler. As he wrote to his mother, "Who could set to work to describe in language worthy of fine scenery and with careful minuteness of detail, the picturesque appearance of any landscape, when he is shivering in dripping garments after a thunderstorm, or, when the over-powering heat of an almost vertical sun is blazing upon the treeless prairies through which he is travelling and when perhaps, he cannot procure a drop of water to cool his burning lips!! And again, on a journey of this nature, master and man must do their utmost to forward the march; there must be no sitting down to rest until all the work is done; the horses must be unloaded, watered and fed, a fire made, meals prepared and the baggage repacked, ready for a start,—after all which, & a hard day's ride, one has little inclination for spouting poetical descriptions of scenery." Such embellishments are not needed; Clouston's picture is, by and large, both vivid and realistic, for he had an observing eye and a genuine gift of anecdote.

For a description and a map of three trails between Fort Garry and St. Paul, see Nute, in Minnesota History, 6:279–282. In his complete sketch, Clouston says that the trail his party followed was "opened in 1842 by people coming from the States, who wished to avoid the dangers of the Sioux country." Thus he corroborates Miss Nute's statement, though she dates the opening two years later. Moreover, according to Clouston the woods road crossed the Red River at its confluence with the Assiniboine and led "along the S. Eastern side of the former," and his record of the rivers he and his companions crossed supports the view that they were traveling on the east bank of the Red River. Miss Nute's map, however, shows all three trails following the west bank between Fort Garry and Pembina. On a trip to St. Paul in 1850, Clouston took a route "further to the west, in more open country," according to his manuscript of 1855.

On the outward journey Clouston recorded the names of the rivers and lakes, making it possible to identify his route; he described the nature of the country with its intermingled hills and rolling prairies; he noted the trees, flowers, and fruits which he saw and the fish to be caught in the many lakes. He was interested in the past as well as in the present. He noticed the recent Indian graves "with plugs of white cotton suspended over them" and recognized "one of those remarkable mounds, two of which are found in the vicinity of Fort Garry . . . supposed to be the cemeteries of some Indian tribes who have entirely disappeared in the lapse of time." He had his lighter moments, too—of them provided by meeting with a group of Saulteaux Indians. "Some of these Indians had fought with the Sioux in spring and had lost several of their party," writes Clouston. "Their faces were therefore blackened—though this custom is imperative yet the quantity of paint is a matter of taste; some have merely a few lines traced across the face, while others will have their whole visages begrimed in this manner, saving perhaps a delicate streak of red round the eyes; these two colors contrast amusingly with their large white grinders, stretching almost from ear to ear."

As the party entered the area crossed by the "war road of both Sioux and Saulteaux," the men took special precautions, keeping watch in turn during the night and making their beds at a little distance from the cart in order to outwit Indian attackers who generally fired under a cart in the belief that travelers invariably sought shelter there. Clouston and his companions were drenched by sudden and violent thunderstorms and plagued by mosquitoes. When wood could be found, they sought solace in the North's chief comfort, tea—"the most refreshing beverage a man can drink when fatigued," according to Clouston. "Although it lacked cream, yet I drank it with unspeakable relish," he continues. "I could see the eyes of my companions rolling in..."
ecstasy as the fragrant decoction poured down their parched throats & I suppose I formed a similar spectacle to them.”

At Leaf Lake the travelers crossed the height of land between waters flowing to the Gulf of Mexico and Hudson Bay. From its southeastern end the Leaf River, a feeder of the Crow Wing, poured into the Mississippi, while from the western side a stream drained into Otter Tail Lake and thence to the northward flowing Red River. Clouston remarked particularly on the striking beauty of this land of lakes. But beyond Leaf River, the party found the country in ashes for nine or ten miles, a destructive fire still smouldering, and in the formerly densely wooded country between the Leaf and the Clearwater rivers only small hummocks of oak and poplar and stunted shrubbery remained.

The men crossed the Mississippi at the mouth of the Crow Wing River, and followed the east bank for a mile or so to the first settlement, “two or three wretched houses called ‘the fort’—an abominable hot-bed of bugs and fleas.” The trader, Allan Morrison, was away from home, but his wife, a Red River half-breed who spoke neither English nor French, invited the officers to a supper of fish, tea, and bread. The daughter of the house, a girl of sixteen or so, spoke very good English and was so attractive to the susceptible Clouston that, he records, “when we rose to go away I took a ring from my finger and put it on her’s asking her to ‘think sometimes of me.’” The fort, according to Clouston, was owned by William A. Aitken, who lived at “Fort des Petites Rochers” [Little Rock] farther down the Mississippi below the mouth of the Platte River. Upon proceeding next morning, the travelers from Red River met the gentleman himself on his way to the fort. After a “very short visit,” Aitken rejoined them, and they went on with him, his wife (“a strapping Saulteaux”), and his sister-in-law as far as the Platte, where they camped for the night while the trader’s party pushed ahead to his post.

THE END of the first stage of the journey from Red River was now in sight, but mis-
fortune overtook the travelers next morning when Bourke became seriously ill. From Aitken’s fort, Clouston sent him off down the river in a hired canoe with one of their two men and another hand in the hope that the sick man might reach Fort Snelling and “benefit by the doctor’s professional skill.” With the other man, Clouston set out the same day, August 16, for St. Paul’s, as the future Minnesota capital was then called, each taking turns in guiding the cart and looking after the baggage horses. First at Aitken’s fort and later en route to St. Paul’s, Clouston met parties of “Red River people [half-breeds] returning from St. Peter’s.” He and his companion arrived in St. Paul’s about eight on the evening of the eighteenth, twenty days out from Fort Garry.

So hard pressed was Clouston on the last three days of the trip that he made no notes, but he remembered with pleasure his breakfast on the last morning on the banks of the Mississippi at “a beautiful stream of clear, cold water, gushing from a steep, clay bank about 40 feet high,” where he bathed before going on. On the other hand, the Falls of St. Anthony, five or six miles below, impressed Clouston no more than they had various predecessors from Red River. “My wild Indian horse was so frightened by some pigs and sheep & was so nearly carrying me over the bank that I had not time for observation,” writes Clouston. “I believe there is nothing very remarkable in them; they sink into insignificance when compared with Niagara or even with many falls in the Indian Country. The whole body of the Mississippi precipitates itself over a ledge of limestone rocks about 15 feet in height, but there is nothing particularly striking in the surrounding scenery.” Perhaps his reaction was a portent; it seemed that nothing about St. Paul’s was to please him.

Clouston describes the frontier community in the following uncomplimentary terms: “‘St. Paul’s’ is a wretched little village consisting of a few scattered houses stuck here and there on the top of a steep bank almost overhanging the Mississippi; almost every house is either a shop or a ‘Grocery’ (i.e. tavern) for the supply of the farmers in the neighboring country and for the Sioux Indians, and certainly, a grocery keeper cannot complain that he had no patronage, for, drinking whisky seems to occupy at least half the time of the worthy citizens of St. Paul’s while the ‘balance’ of their time is employed in cheating each other or imposing upon strangers. The farmers cultivate merely enough ground to furnish themselves with the necessaries of life without, apparently, making any attempt to better their condition; they seem an indolent, lazy, worthless class of men, so the miserable and dirty appearance of their houses may be imagined.”

Clouston “was directed to ‘Mr [Henry]
Jackson's for lodging, and going thither was ushered into a room of small dimensions, containing three beds, each large enough for two or three people, and here, was soon visited by some of the lounging rascals who were sneaking about the place and who came to see what could be made out of the 'stranger'—but he had so many questions to ask, that they had little opportunity for their 'guessing.' Mr. Jackson was from home and the major domo was a tall, parchment-faced looking brute who introduced himself as 'Doctor Renfrew' and asked me if I would 'liquor with him', but as he and four or five others seemed already to have got about as much as they could carry, I declined joining them and went to bed, thinking to have rest and quiet, but woefully was I disappointed! I had scarcely lain down when four noisy, half tipsy blackguards came in and I had the unhappiness to perceive that they were to occupy the other two beds. I was kept awake by their edifying conversation till a late hour and I soon found that to the list of my tormentors I could add fleas and bugs—besides a pack of anxious thoughts—the whole together constituting about as efficient a night mare as I ever suffered from."

On the following morning, Clouston "rode up to the garrison and found Mr Bourke still suffering very much, but no longer in danger." While at the post, the writer records, "I dined with Major [John B.] Clark and his lady, a very agreeable, talkative woman, who seemed surprised to learn that there was a more lonely & out-of-the-way place than St. Peter's. 'For,' said she, 'we can only get letters once a fortnight from our friends'; but when I told her that in our Country we were fortunate if we received intelligence from Home twice a year she held up her hands in horror and wondered that we would live in such a country. I returned to St. Paul's, bought a bark canoe, hired two men and prepared for a start on the following day.

Although he was ready to begin the voyage downstream, Clouston writes that "On Thursday 20th August, I was detained by my men getting drunk, until about midday. I asked 'Doctor Renfrew' for a statement of my Bill—'Well' said he, 'I have kept no rotunda of it, so I guess we had better make a lumping business of the whole'. One fellow, while examining my Axe said, 'if them is the only kind of Axe you raise in your country, I guess your blacksmiths are darned, considerable smart'."

CLOUSTON was more favorably impressed by St. Paul in 1850, when he went there to meet a shipment of goods he had purchased earlier in New York and transport it to Fort Garry. By that time the town had become a territorial capital and the form of its name had changed. "When I reached the principal Hotel, all travel-stained, &
with a beard of 40 days growth,” he writes, “I must have looked a queer figure but such apparitions are I daresay common there, & my appearance did not seem to excite any ridicule, though of course I had a torrent of questions showered upon me.” He goes on to explain that on his earlier visit, in 1846, St. Paul “contained only a few houses built on a high bank overlooking the Mississippi, but now it had grown into a considerable town with Churches & Hotels & other public buildings, & though yet upon the outskirts of civilization it had all the activity of a place where considerable business is done.”

The visitor found that “The change at the Falls, was still more striking for there the same spirit of enterprize had built a ‘barriere’ across the Mississippi above the Fall, to make it available for Sawing Mills, & a town had sprung up where a few years ago there were only a few scattered farm houses.”

UPON LEAVING St. Paul’s in 1846, Clouston proceeded downstream by canoe to Prairie du Chien, where he hoped to make connections with a steamer to St. Louis. His experience as a traveler in the wilderness of Rupert’s Land stood him in good stead in this country of “make-do” transportation, and his tolerance and sympathy for his men are well illustrated by his attitude toward his drunken and irrepresible French-Canadian steersman, an old rascal whom he thought both amusing and admirable. All along the Mississippi, as his men paddled southward past the mouth of the St. Croix and then “took the ‘traverse’” of Lake Pepin, the size and rugged beauty of the river impressed him greatly, but he found depressing the conditions under which both whites and Indians were living along its banks.

“At considerable distances, we passed houses with sometimes a pretty little garden or a field of Indian Corn beside them,” writes Clouston, “but, to judge from the general appearance of these farms, indolence is a prevailing propensity. The generality of these houses are whiskey shops, where either whitemen or Indians may obtain the villainous poison which they call ‘whiskey’, and the Indians appear more wretched than any of the savages of Hud-

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12 These remarks are quoted from Clouston’s manuscript of 1855.

THE corner of Third and Robert streets, St. Paul, 1851
son's Bay; they are ruined in health and means by the free use of spirits, which they can obtain all along the river, without restrictions. The principal aim of Fur traders in this country seems to be, to plunge the poor savages into debt, and, when the annual pay-day for the Lands comes round, they present their bills to the government officers and their claims are settled. The government thus openly encourages the pillaging of the poor Indians, besides the consequent evil effects of degrading their minds and degenerating their race. One trader at St Peter's has a claim against the Sioux of three or four hundred thousand dollars, and he only waits for the lands being purchased to present his Bill."

Below Lake Pepin Clouston had a pleasant encounter with "two Boston gentlemen," Edward Wheelwright and Edmund Dwight, who with a boatman were descending the Mississippi in a skiff. Earlier in the summer they "had visited the Falls of Niagara," and thence "had followed the Lakes to LaPointe in Lake Superior, and making a portage of about eighty miles, had descended the St. Croix river to its junction with the Mississippi."

At Prairie du Chien, Clouston found an old acquaintance, "Charles Brisbois, late of the Company's service," who had settled there. He had "suffered much from the Bilious fever" prevalent at Prairie du Chien, according to Clouston, and "from being a hale fresh-looking North-wester," Brisbois "was metamorphosed into a cadaverous sallow-complexioned Yankee." Clouston hastens to add that this change notwithstanding, Brisbois "still retained all the warmhearted feelings of hospitality so common to fur-traders." Together the two men visited Fort Crawford, and Clouston was struck by its flimsy construction. He notes that the post "seems only intended for over-awing the Indians, for certainly it could not hold out against disciplined men; there

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44 Traders who had claims against the Sioux were numerous. Most of the claims were not settled until 1851, when the Sioux lands were acquired by the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. For accounts of the "traders' papers" signed by the chiefs at these places, see William W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota, 1:282-284, 297 (St. Paul, 1921).

15 For a detailed history of this post, see Bruce E. Mahan, Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier (Iowa City, 1926). A concise sketch is included in Wisconsin: A Guide to the Badger State, 442 (New York, 1941). Excavations have revealed the outlines of the old fort, and the post hospital has been restored for use as a historical museum. Charles Brisbois was a native of Prairie du Chien who entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company about 1815 and returned to his home community in 1843. In 1846 he was serving as a member of a volunteer army company which supplemented the garrison at Fort Crawford while the regular troops were serving in the Mexican War. The temporary volunteers drew Clouston's amused comment. For information about Brisbois, see B. W. Brisbois, "Traditions and Recollections of Prairie du Chien," in Wisconsin Historical Collections, 9:283 (1889).
are houses on three sides of it within range of a musket and on one of these sides, the barracks with common glazed windows, form the wall." The visitor was somewhat amused by the "few undisciplined volunteers in the Fort and their utter contempt for regularity even in dress." Among them "one fellow had a soldier's jacket, with an old battered felt hat and the sentry wore gaiters and a fustian shooting jacket."

Failing to find the expected steamer at Prairie du Chien, Clouston left the river and proceeded to Galena by a stagecoach which was "merely a covered cart with springs and wretchedly fitted up inside." The other male passenger preferred to sit by the driver, so Clouston was left to flirt with a pretty Yankee girl who soon reached her destination. He dined that night at Platteville under circumstances that remind one irresistibly of poor Mrs. Trollope's comments on American manners as observed on her journey up the Mississippi in 1828-1829. On the following day, he went on to Galena, where again there was no boat, so Clouston set out by stage once more for Peoria on the Illinois River, where, he was informed, there was constant communication with St. Louis. He had now left behind the frontier wilderness for a beautiful country of farms and "neat little villages." Over part of the route he had an amusing traveling companion in an old lady whose ideas of matrimony, for her day, now seem highly modern, but which Clouston surprisingly described as "rather antediluvian; she said that people should marry with the understanding that if they did not suit each other they should separate and get other mates."

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16 See Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 18 (New York, 1949).
17 Earlier, at Galena, Clouston met Wheelwright, who "was just about starting by the mail coach to Chicago," while his companion continued to St. Louis. Letters of introduction written in 1856 by Sir George Simpson to Hudson's Bay Company officers in eastern Canada on behalf of "Mr. Dwight of Boston wishing to make a pleasure excursion northward from the Saguenay and perhaps down the St. Lawrence" are in the company's archives, D.4/92, p. 5.
coming to Rupert's Land, we went round Cape Horn! I said 'no, one came by Hudson's Bay'; 'Ah yes', said he 'through the St. Lawrence.'"

A week later, on Sunday, September 13, Clouston was still in St. Louis. His comments on the events of that day read: "Went to church. Yesterday I shipped about eleven tons of Tea, sugar &c and expect to get off to-morrow. I got a very beautiful fur cap from a Mr. Campbell, who was once a fur-trader in the Rocky Mountains and with whom I had some long conversations: it is curious how these old retired fur traders like to dwell upon the recollections of their former life. Everybody takes me for a native of the north of Ireland."

Clouston notes that "St. Louis, about the year 1814 was merely a small village containing only one street and a narrow back land and inhabited chiefly by people of French descent, whereas in the present day there are fourteen streets running parallel to the river, intersected by numerous cross-streets, 'avenues' and lanes. It is about five miles long by three in breadth and contains a population of Forty five thousand. From an observatory on the Planter's house a fine view is obtained of the city, the river and the country on the eastern bank." Clouston realized that the city's strategic location assured its future importance. "St. Louis commands a very extensive commerce," he writes. "The products of numerous settlements on these noble rivers, and of the boundless country stretching far to the North and to the west, pours immense wealth into the city, while the trade on the rivers, keeps great numbers of steamers constantly employed. There are seldom fewer than from eighty to one hundred steamers in the port; in fact, St. Louis bids fair to equal if not surpass in size and wealth the fair 'Queen of the West' Cincinnati [sic]."

CLOUSTON left St. Louis on the evening of September 14 on the "Lightfoot," a new steamer built in Cincinnati.18 Proceeding upriver, the steamboat passed Alton with its penitentiary. Upon reaching Keokuk at the foot of the Lower Rapids the boat discharged its cargo temporarily and sent it "to the head of the rapids in large flat-bottomed boats or 'Keels.'" Then the steamer "drawing about twenty two inches commenced the ascent." At Nauvoo and Montrose, Clouston saw large groups of Mormons evacuating their homes for their trek to the West.19 The invasion of the ship at Davenport by "a motley crowd of twenty or thirty people" who made free with the premises called forth another homely, again reminiscent of Mrs. Trollope, on the iniquitous equality of American society, but Clouston had a sense of humor which she seems to have completely lacked and he found much to amuse him in the mushroom towns of the Mississippi and the Yankee thirst for "speculation." The steamboat reached Galena on September 24, Prairie du Chien on the twenty-seventh, and Lake Pepin, ablaze with autumn colors, on the twenty-ninth. About dark on the thirty-first Clouston "landed at [the mouth of] the St. Croix not being able to ascend the river on account of the low water."

There alarming news awaited Clouston. "Through every stage of the journey difficulties had started up in my path," he writes, "and now, when deeming them over and anticipating an immediate departure for..."
Red River, fresh disappointments awaited me; a report was current here that only five [Red River] carts had come on and that numbers of the people had died along the road. My anxiety to obtain accurate information may be imagined and I accordingly hired a horse and a guide and rode up next morning to St. Paul's, and there had the happiness to find that though all but five carts had turned back, a second party had been induced to undertake the journey and had arrived at St Paul's the very evening that I reached St. Croix. Mr. Bourke came down to St. Paul's shortly after my arrival and I was sorry to see that he was still extremely weak. I rode up in the evening to the garrison and called upon Major Clark to thank him for his courtesy and kindness to my sick friend. I afterwards crossed the St. Peter's river to call on Mr. Sibley but he was absent & when I returned to where I had left my horse, he was missing and I had the pleasure of walking back to St. Paul's."

Upon “finding that the people of St Paul's wished to charge an exorbitant rate for the porterage of the goods from St Croix,” where the “Lightfoot” left them, Clouston "rode down the following evening and procured two waggons at a much more moderate rate, saving, at least 40 cents p 100 lbs weight. Until the 8th October,” he continues, “I was constantly in the saddle between St. Croix & St Paul's — and in the meantime Sir George Simpson arrived from Red River; having come across on horseback in the unprecedented short time of Ten days and a half. He remained one night at St Paul's and then embarked in a small boat for the Prairie du Chien. I rode down the same day to St. Croix, where he remained that night and next morning he left early. On the 8th [of October] I had sent off a party of six carts with instructions to await my arrival at the "traverse" of the Mississippi [at Crow Wing] and on the 8th sent off the last brigade of carts. On the 9th Mr. Bourke, in a buggy, & myself on horseback with a cart and thirteen horses, bade adieu with much pleasure to the villainous den of blackguards."

THE RETURN JOURNEY through the Minnesota country under wintry conditions is described by Clouston as follows: "On the 10th we overtook the last carts and encamped at the Big Lake where we were detained all the following day by heavy rain. On the 14th, having passed Mr. Aitken's Fort, we encountered a snowstorm, and the snow, melting as it fell, wet us to the skin; it gradually became cold & by the time we reached La rivière Platte, I was scarcely able to walk. The following day amid sleet & snow, we left our encampment and were glad to reach the spring, where formerly I had dined in company with Mr Bourke and Mr Aitken. The only wood being red oak we could not make fire enough to keep ourselves warm and we lay shivering in our wet garments all night. The 16th was clear and cold and there was a crust upon the snow very trying to the poor horses. On the 17th we reached the
Crow Island traverse, where I found Berland with the six carts, and also three other carts containing the baggage of a Catholic priest and his servant, bound for Red River and who had waited here for my arrival. We now formed a party of about twenty men; we had 24 carts, about forty horses and ten or twelve oxen. By employing a number of Indians with their canoes we crossed the Mississippi, ascended the steep bank and encamped in the woods.

"The next two days were cold and gloomy. The 29th was milder—the snow thawed a little and the heavy, wintry looking clouds seemed breaking up; we encamped near a small lake where our horses had good feeding and here one of my men (Montreuil) mounted into a large pine tree with an axe in his hand, and ascending until within ten feet or so from the top cut away the branches beneath, leaving the naked stem with a large bush of branches at the top. This is called a 'lopstick' and was duly christened as mine and a volley from twelve or fifteen guns announced the event: of course I had to come down handsomely in the article of whiskey—but I did not care for this, as I was glad to see the poor fellows forget their hardships. The woods rang with their songs & many a merry tale and good-humoured jest passed round, and I 'rayther calculate' that the priest must have thought them half-mad, especially as they forgot to count their beads that evening.

"It is the best way, when travelling with half-breeds and Canadians, to lay aside all austerity, and, while repressing any approach to familiarity, treat them with kindness, impressing them with the idea that their comfort and happiness are not forgotten, and, at the same time, to share in their hardships whatever these may be; harsh treatment makes bad servants; fear may make them work while overlooked but when the master's eye is not upon them his orders will not be attended to. I had several untractable subjects to deal with, but am confident that, with one or two exceptions, they would all have stood by me to the last in any emergency.

"On Thursday the 22nd we crossed the Crow [Crow Wing] river and encamped at La riviere l'eau claire [Clearwater]. In crossing this last stream a serious accident occurred. One of the people stumbled and fell while taking a heavily laden cart down the bank and the wheel passed over his body. We tried to bleed him but the blood would not flow. It is horrible when people are dangerously ill and no medical assistance near. On the following day he felt better and we set out about 10 o'clock, I having undertaken to bring on all the horses.

"On the 24th the weather: assumed a fairer aspect, the sky became clear, and the mild southerly wind was delightfully invigorating. Montreuil having got hold of some whiskey belonging to the sick man, got drunk and quarrelled with Berland; the priest interfered to stop the fight but Montreuil then offered to fight him and he was glad to leave them. I succeeded in pacifying the fellows for the quarrel had assumed a serious aspect. M was quite mad with passion—he foamed at the mouth and gnashed his teeth like a wolf at bay and seizing the axle of a cart, raised it over his head and swore he would dash out the brains of the first who approached him. Perranteau drew his knife to interfere in the fight but was deprived of it and with the aid of a little blarney all was made smooth. Every man has his weak side, and Montret's was vanity, which seemed to give rise to a sort of nervous fear of the censure of 'the world'. His character was

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5 This meeting took place at the mouth of the Crow Wing River, where Clouston crossed the Mississippi on his trip southward. Berland probably was Pascal Berland, a prominent Red River metis who lived at White Horse Plain near Fort Garry. Although Clouston later refers to the priest as a Jesuit (p. 51), there is good evidence that he was Father Pierre Aubert, the first of the Oblates to go to Red River. Both Berland and Aubert are mentioned in Morton's introduction to Colville's London Correspondence, xix n., lxxix n., xci n., cxxxii n.

6 For a description of this custom, see Grace Lee Nute, The Voyageur, 67 (St. Paul, 1955).
a strange compound: half savage, half civilised, he had all the superstition and vindictive nature of an Indian mixed with something like generosity, and, as I said before, a strong dash of self-esteem. For an uneducated man he was the most subtle reasoner I ever knew and nothing seemed to delight him more than to draw some of the people into an argument, in which he was sure to come off victorious. I have heard him bring forward arguments against certain forms and dogmas of the catholic religion, which the most learned theologian might have been proud to own as his, and then, having upset his antagonists, he would turn and argue with as much tact on the other side of the question. He was a most incorrigible drunkard, but when no intoxicating liquor could be got was a first-rate man.

"We encamped at Leaf river, where we found the track of a horse that escaped us three days before. On the 25th we encountered a large camp of Saulteauxs who, but for our numbers might have given us some trouble. The scoundrels had discovered a cache of provisions &c left by Governor Simpson and which I had trusted to for a supply but every thing eatable had disappeared and I had to content myself with salt pork and flour, which had been our only provisions since leaving St. Paul's. We encamped at Lac Passant;\(^\text{25}\) the next evening we encamped at the north end of Lac de detroit [Detroit Lake] and I wrote to Mr [Alexander] Christie, requesting relays of horses and supplies of provisions in order to enable us to reach the settlement before winter set in.\(^\text{24}\) On the 28th we remained in our encampment repairing our carts, because we were now approaching the prairie where no suitable timber can be procured. I sent Montreuil off to Red River and would fain have accompanied him myself but did not like to leave the brigade while there was a chance of difficulty.

"On the 29th we encamped at Buffalo river. While breakfasting at the edge of the woods, two Indians had visited us and brought some furs to trade with the men,

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\(^\text{23}\) The author has been unable to identify this lake definitely, but it may be the present Rush Lake. Clouston described it earlier in his account as "about 4 miles long by 3 in width," and he states that he "here saw the most southerly feeder of the Red River—only 15 yards wide. It falls into Otter tail River, and both united form the Red River."

\(^\text{24}\) Christie was governor of Assiniboia and chief factor at Fort Garry. W. Stewart Wallace, ed., Encyclopedia of Canada, 2:59 (Toronto, 1935).
but as we were still upon American territory I would not permit it. They demanded ammunition and whiskey, but I explained to them that we had not come to trade but were carrying goods through the country under the permission of the American government, which permission was granted upon conditions of our not trading with the Indians nor giving them liquor, and, that apart from this, we had a long journey before us and had brought only such supplies as were absolutely necessary for ourselves. They said that for several years they had allowed Red River people to pass through their land, frightening away the wild animals and had not received even a mouthful of provisions from them (the two vagabonds were at that moment stuffing themselves with pork and cakes and drinking tea). I told them that my reason for not giving them more provisions, was, that two of our caches had been plundered by them, which compelled me to take good care of what remained. The ungrateful humbugs did not appreciate my logic, but vowed that in future they would levy blackmail on all passers by.

"On Friday the 30th we encamped among the Thunder Hills. On the 31st we encamped beyond the Rice [Wild Rice] River & on the 1st November we encamped near the Sand Hill river and the following day crossed it during a heavy fall of rain, and took breakfast in the ravine of the two Lakes, which seemed so fresh when first I saw them; but the difference in the weather was great — then, the weather was fine and the ravine clothed with verdure, now, the rain was pouring down upon us, the grass was withered, the trees had dropped their foliage and rocked their naked branches in the bleak wind and in every hollow lay drifts of snow. We proceeded, taking some wood upon our carts and travelling all the afternoon. Encamped in the open prairie with merely enough fire to boil our tea-kettles. The sun set in a blaze of glory, every tint and hue imaginable seemed to lend their aid to honor his departure beneath the horizon of the gorgeous West.

"Before daylight on the following morning we left our encampment. The sun rose bright and unclouded, promising fine weather, and, with a lighter heart and more buoyant spirits than I had had for a long time, I pushed on ahead with the horses in order to cross the Red Lake River and have a fire made before the carts should arrive. The morning was beautifully clear; I could distinguish to the westward the dark line of the woods on the Red River. Our road leading over hills of a considerable height gave us an extensive view — on one side, an immense prairie was spread out before us like a map on which we could trace the windings of the Red Lake River until, in the distance it became blended with the bluish haze of the atmosphere. Between us and the river, the road descended to a level plain of about five miles in extent, beyond which rose the right bank of the stream generally well wooded.

"In fording the river one of the baggage horses got entangled in a cord dragged by another horse and was capsized, heels over head into the water, or, as Jonathan would express it — 'he was split into the drink'. Another poor animal wishing to treat himself to a good roll, rolled himself between two trees and stuck fast and we had to extricate the gentleman from his difficul-
ties. Poor brutes! it is not surprising that they were weary and footsore; they had come with Mr. [John] Rowand from the Saskatchewan in May and with merely two months' rest in Red River, had performed a journey to St. Peter's of about 600 miles. There they had bad feeding and were lean when we set out upon our return. Supposing that they had started from Carlton in May and this post is the nearest to Red River—they travelled about two thousand miles in six months! When we reached Red River, some of them had their hoofs worn down to the 'frog' of the foot & they had not been here more than two weeks when they were sent off to Fort Ellice—at least two hundred miles from this—to pass the winter.

"OUR CARTS crossed the [Red Lake] river safely—the horses were turned loose to feed and we had our breakfast. I wish you could have had a glance at our caravan: you would have seen Mr Bourke & myself stretched full length in front of a good fire which I had kindled near the foot of a noble Elm—Mr B. with a thick duffle coat & red night-cap and me with a foraging cap, a red flannel shirt, trousers and leggings & leather belt—smoking our pipes while our tea was preparing. All around grew majestic Elms, Oak, Maple and other fine trees, through which we had a glimpse of the river. Our carts stood in the winding path and the men were standing or lying around their fires in different places. The variety of costume would have struck you as singular, among which, the Priest's robes were conspicuous, having too effeminate a cut (there—a most euphonious construction of sentences) for our party. I here thought of treating myself to a shave. To save trouble I had allowed my beard & moustache to vegetate at will but I now got rather proud of them and merely reaped a little spot on my chin in order to contrast strikingly with the surrounding forest of hair.

"After a rest of two or three hours we continued our journey and encamped a little before sunset on a fine ridge of land bordered on each side by Poplar and Willows. I shot three hares after sunset and sent two of them to the priest who, shortly afterwards came over to thank me. He spoke French with a strong provincial accent so that I had great difficulty in understanding him; however, from what I understood of his conversation I could see that he was a person of no ordinary talent. To this he added the most gentlemanly manners and a very prepossessing appearance. He is a Jesuit and therefore my praises deserve more credit.

I care little what a man's creed may be, so long as he makes himself agreeable; in fact I am not a bigot and have but a very slight dash of early prejudices—I mean prejudices springing from education and the tone of society in which I moved when I was young. I can't tolerate bigotry either in persons or books... Some people say that papists have no chance of salvation,—no man will ever convince me of this... I believe that even the poor savage who roams the prairies, who will make an offering to the sun before eating and believes in the existence of innumerable spirits—good and evil—whose creed is a system of fables,—he who will even present an offering to the 'Evil Spirit' to depreciate his wrath—I believe that even this benighted heathen has an equal chance with a christian, of being saved. For this..."
end, his ignorance is a surety, provided always, that he follow the dictates of his conscience, because if he follow and obey this, the only monitor & guide that Providence has given him, he could not, consistently with justice & benevolence, be punished for not conforming to laws of the existence of which he was ignorant. This is one reason of my dislike for Methodists—they shew most uncharitable feelings towards their neighbors. They should recollect the words 'judge not, that ye be not judged'. . .

"On the 4th we performed about twenty miles before breakfast, which we took upon the ridge before mentioned as commencing at La riviere Serpente [Snake River]. Gradually the air became darkened by clouds of smoke, the southerly wind, now blowing a regular storm, bearing it along in volumes of rapidly increasing density until at length our range of vision was bounded by a circle of not more than two or three miles in diameter. Fortunately for us, the fire was on the south side of the Red Lake River.

"We encamped at La riviere serpente in company with some Red Lake Saulteaux—there was ice here two inches in thickness. We were stationed under a high bank round which the wind swept in such sudden squalls as to preclude the possibility of having a fire all night. Next day was fine—pheasants were numerous & I had excellent sport. We encamped at Juniper [Tamarac?] River and were met by Mr. Bourke's son with two saddle horses & another man with a horse and cart—they had left the Settlement shortly after the arrival of my messenger and reported that a number of others were to follow them almost immediately. The following day Mr B. and his son left us. About noon I met three or four light carts coming to relieve some of our brigade and a cart of the Company's with provisions; we encamped together at the south branch of the Twin Rivers.

"About midnight the people started, being anxious to reach the Settlement and at the same time to steal a march upon me, as they were aware of my intention of leaving them. I left the encampment with two men and a band of eight or ten horses, about 8 A.M. and about nine miles beyond the north branch, found Mr. Bourke and his son taking breakfast in the open plain, having been detained by some of their horses escaping. Considerably in advance, we passed the carts—the fellows were in

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30 The Snake River is among the streams mentioned by Clouston in a section of the narrative, here omitted, relating to the southward journey. There he comments on the "extraordinary ridges of land which . . . must at one time have been the bank of an immense lake." They were, of course, the shores of Glacial Lake Agassiz. See Warren Upham, Minnesota Geographic Names, 7 (St. Paul, 1920).

31 Pheasants were unknown in Minnesota and the Red River Valley until after 1900. Clouston probably was hunting either the ruffed grouse or partridge, or the sharp-tailed grouse. See W. J. Breckenridge, "A Century of Minnesota Wild Life," in Minnesota History, 30: 225, 226 (September, 1949).
high glee at having given me the slip but now, it was my turn to laugh as we cantered past the heavily laden 'voitures'.

“We soon after met three carts and a light horse — and when we reached the Riviere de Roseau [Roseau River] the sun was getting low; we turned loose our horses, made a fire and had a cup of tea and a piece of pem[\]ican and were soon joined by Mr. Bourke and his son; we then proceeded in the gloaming to 'La riviere du milieu' [Middle River], where we encamped, having come about fifty or fifty five miles. We had encamped here on our way to St. Peters — but with very different feelings from those now occupying our minds; in fact almost every thing was directly opposite to what it then was — as Uncle Sam would say, 'we aint what we used to was'. Our outward bound party was small and badly equipped with horses; we were all suffering from the disease then prevalent in the Settlement - - which produced debility of body and low spirits — and we were setting out upon a long and, as we thought, a hazardous journey. . . . Now we were in good humour; we were healthy from hard exercise and long exposure; I had changed from a pale cadaverous quill-driver, whose very blood seemed to have dried up from too constant application at the hated desk, to a strong, bronzed visaged, hardy voyageur. We were all enjoying the prospect of seeing our friends on the morrow, and we had the satisfaction of having made a successful expedition. We had only a few withered willow branches for fire-wood but notwithstanding cold & fatigue we sat up some hours talking over the events of our journey which was fast drawing to a close.

“Next day we were off about 3 A.M. — we breakfasted at the Rat River at the edge of burnt ground. We here said adieu to Mr. Bourke who could not keep pace with us, and sped our way homewards through a waste of dust and ashes. Every thing in the shape of vegetation was burned up — the swamps were dry and as we pushed on towards the Settlement, our little cavalcade raised a cloud of dust and ashes almost suffocating us. When we reached the first houses, about ten or twelve miles above the Forks, we stopped to water our horses; the people were just arriving from the Catholic church and the gay dresses and the smiling faces of the half-breed girls — some of them old acquaintances, were pleasant to at least one of our party, after seeing nothing but our own smoke-stained and weather-beaten visages for about thirty days.

“We reached the Forks about 4 P.M., having ridden fifty miles. I took Mr. Christie quite by surprise, being dressed en voyageur and my face begrimed with dust and ashes. I received a most cordial welcome & repeated congratulations upon my success and safe return. The carts arrived a few days later — all safe

“My journey of about three thousand miles—occupying three months—was thus brought to a prosperous conclusion.”

To end his story Clouston repeated an amusing dialogue, probably collected on his travels, which distils the essence of the Mississippi spirit of his day.

“Where is the 'Far West'? 

"'Is it Indiana'? 'I guess not'! 'Missouri'? 'No it ar'n't'! 'Iowa'? 'N-o-o-o'!

'Then where the d---l is this 'far West'? 'Well, stranger, I guess, it's about two miles t'other side of Sun down!'

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