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Tragedies of a Vast Wilderness

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

I WAS taking leave of Inspector Fitzgerald on the Mackenzie River, not far below the arctic circle. Fitzgerald was a member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and we had traveled several hundred miles together through the thin forests and over the barrens to the east. He was one of the few men I had met that I would have pitted against the odds of starvation and cold in the northland and wagered heavily on. Such men die hard. He was straight as a birch sapling, not over-large, with splendid shoulders, slim-hipped, every fiber in him trained to the resilient strength of spring steel. He was one of the best men in the service, and he was always laughing, even in the face of hardship and storm. In leaving, I said,

"I'll see you again in about a year, Fitzgerald, if we're both living."

"If," he said, and I can see him laughing and twisting his blond mustache. "Fate deals out some funny hands up here," he went on, "and mebbey you'll come back to find me under one of those little wooden crosses up at Fort MacPherson."

I almost forgot those words in the months that passed, but there came a day when they returned to me like a flash of lightning. I had picked up a paper in Toronto, and there I saw the item that told me Inspector Fitzgerald had perished. With three companions, Constables Carter, Kinney and Walker, he had set out early in the winter on the patrol from Dawson to Fort MacPherson. On May 1st the dead bodies of Kinney and Taylor were found thirty-five miles from the fort. Carter had struggled on a little farther, and Fitzgerald, with his magnificent strength and endurance, was within ten miles of the goal when he died. Starvation and the cold had killed them.

"And mebbey you'll come back to find me under one of those little wooden crosses up at Fort MacPherson!" he had said.

Even out of that cold, black and white newspaper print it almost seemed as though I could hear Fate's grisly laugh. For that's where Fitzgerald is—up under one of those little wooden crosses at Fort MacPherson!

It may be that there is good reason for primitive man's fear of the "devil spirits," for Fate does deal out some "funny hands" in the wild places, and their memory remains with one until the end of time. There is nothing peculiarly epic or lasting in the picture of a human life ground out under the wheels of a street car or in the spectacle of a fireman falling to his death on a city pavement. It is terrible enough, but it is only an ordinary and forgettable part of the rushing game. In the wilderness—and in the wilderness alone—tragedy bears the touch of the master hand; and years after a death struggle like that of Fitzgerald and his men, the story is recalled around a hundred camp fires, and lives again in the low moaning of the storm winds, in the hungerful cry of the wolf, in the rush of the streams and in

killed Sergeant R. M. Donaldson. That was where Fate dealt another "funny hand," as Fitzgerald would say if death had not come to prove the truth of his own words. Donaldson was in charge of a party taking supplies from Fort Churchill to Fullerton, and early in August they struck camp four days' journey up the bay from Churchill, opposite a small island that was about a mile from shore. The island was a favorite haunt of the walrus, and parties up and down always stopped at this point for fresh meat. On this particular day Donaldson had felt an oppressive sensation of homesickness. He had spoken of it several times, and Constable Ford suggested that the excitement of walrus shooting would "do him good," as he expressed it. Donaldson, however, refused to go, and Ford set out alone in a dinghey. Several hours later he returned with a walrus head and said that he had left several dead walrus at the island. He wanted help and asked Donaldson and Corporal Reeves to assist him in bringing in the fat heads, which furnished the finest and juiciest cuts of steak. Again Donaldson demurred, but this time both Ford and Reeves urged him to accompany them, and in the end he took a position in the bow of the dinghey.

"I don't want to go," he expostulated good-naturedly, "but—if you insist—you can do the work and I'll have the fun."

Once among the walruses, his mood changed. He became suddenly very excited and fired repeatedly at the popping heads. After making several hits, he lowered his rifle and said,

"This is too tame! I wish they'd fight!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when the water boiled up with a sudden explosion less than a dozen feet ahead of the dinghey, and a huge bull walrus charged them. Not a word, not a cry, not an audible sound came from Donaldson's lips. He raised his rifle, but it was too late. The crash came, and Donaldson pitched over the side and disappeared in the frothing turmoil made by the rush of the great beast's body. In the wrecked dinghey Ford and Reeves made their way to shore. Donaldson's body was never found. On Marble Island there is a small cairn of rocks exposed to the full blasts of the wild arctic storms, and from the top of it there rises a slab bearing Donaldson's name. And already that lonely cairn is known as "Donaldson's Wish."

"You never can tell what will happen," said Constable McDiarmid, away up at Fullerton, on Hudson Bay; and that grim joker, Fate, seemed to hear his words in passing and stopped.

On that day there was a dull and steady roar in the air, like the rumbling of subterranean volcanoes, for the arctic ice was breaking up. Constable McMillan had just returned to the lonely barracks from a short hunting trip and had brought no game. His poor luck was almost proverbial, and whenever one of his comrades came in empty-handed, he

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THE taxation proposal phia's reform may be European than A increase the revenue of the to its borrowing capacity, enburg makes the following recommendations:

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Nervous troubles are caused by improper food than most people im doctors sometimes overlook. A man says: "Until two years ago we were with most of our troubles."

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tion from Dawson to Fitz-gerald. On May 1st the dead bodies of Kinney and Taylor were found thirty-five miles from the fort. Carter had struggled on a little farther, and Fitzgerald, with his magnificent strength and endurance, was within ten miles of the goal when he died. Starvation and the cold had killed them.

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For it is here that man lives not in the crowded and juggernaut-ridden path of other men and their inventions, but in the face of "the spirit"—that strange power for good or evil which the Greeks of the far north believe is in everything about them, from the tree crying out from its frozen heart in the cold of winter to the dying rush of the wounded bull moose who spits a dog upon its stiletto prongs as it crashes to earth. Even that spitted dog one will never forget who looks upon it, though through the vista of passing years there may grow fainter and fainter, until they dissolve entirely into the gloom of that great canvas called forgetfulness, the pictures of other scenes more terrible. But they are not pictures painted in the grim loneliness of the wilderness, where "the spirit"—or what the white men call superstition—is something to be reckoned with, after all. One by one the strongest men in the wilderness come to that time in their lives when they are convinced that this is so.

There are those at Fort Churchill, on Hudson Bay, who believe that a "wish"

changed. It became suddenly very excited and fired repeatedly at the popping heads. After making several hits, he lowered his rifle and said, "This is too tame! I wish they'd fight!"

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"Which means that we won't have seal steak for supper," bantered Constable Walker. "Better let Joe go!" Joe was an Eskimo. For several minutes McMillan's comrades chaffed him good-naturedly, and it was then that McDiarmid said, "Never mind, Mac. You may shoot something some day. You never can tell what will happen!"

McMillan went after the seal, while his comrades watched him. After making a detour of about a quarter of a mile, he came up behind an ice hummock and found that he could approach nearer to his game without exposing himself to view. It was a long shot—fully four hundred yards. McMillan made up his mind to chance a shot, and also to make a record. He aimed and fired.

McDiarmid was watching the shot through the telescope.

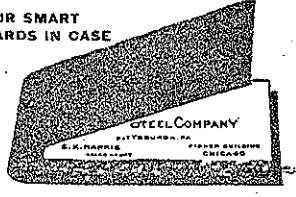
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
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- A graded tax of from 60 cents to 75 cents on total value of all household furnishings above \$300.
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- Tax of from 25 to 60 cents a motor vehicle, in addition to the mobile license fee.
- Tax on all overhanging signs.
- Tax on vaults under sidewalks.
- Rental for use of conduits in streets.
- Banks to pay an increase of one cent on deposits of city money. The same on physical properties of corporations.

The mayor claims that to increase the city's borrow \$84,000,000, to which the well reply it would decrease amount their own borrow. No American city is ready burdensome system of tax characterizes European municipalities.

It's the Food
THE TRUE WAY TO CORRECT TROUBLES.

Nervous troubles are caused by improper food than most people imagine. Doctors sometimes overlook a man says:

"Until two years ago I suffered with meat and gravy with features of my breakfast. Pepsin came on and I found bad condition, worse in than any other time. I was full, sick feeling in my stomach, pains in my heart, sides and back."

"At times I would have for days, then I would be never satisfied when I did nervous I felt like shriek of my voice. I lost flesh hardly knew which way to go one day I bought a box of food to see if I could eat it without telling the doctor it fine; made me feel as if I still I didn't have that had felt after eating any of it."

"I hadn't drank any of five weeks. I kept on with Nuts and in a month and gained 15 pounds, could eat what I wanted, didn't feel eating and my nervousness. It's a pleasure to be well again. Name given by Postum Creek, Mich. Read the Road to Wellville," in "There's a reason."

Ever read the above new one appears from them? They are genuine, true of human interest.

Taxes for Everybody.

THE taxation proposals of Philadelphia's reform mayor sound more European than American. To increase the revenue of the city and add to its borrowing capacity, Mayor Blankenburg makes the following remarkable recommendations:

A graded tax of from 50 cents to \$1 on all occupations.

Tax on total value of all household furniture and furnishings above \$500.

Tax of \$1 on each \$1,000 worth of goods manufactured in the city.

Tax of from 25 to 50 cents a horsepower on all motor vehicles, in addition to the present State automobile license fee.

Tax on all overhanging signs.

Tax on vaults under sidewalks.

Rental for use of conduits in streets.

Banks to pay an increase of one-half of 1 per cent on deposits of city money. The rate is now 2 per cent.

Tax on physical properties of public service corporations.

The mayor claims that this would increase the city's borrowing capacity \$84,000,000, to which the people might well reply it would decrease by the same amount their own borrowing ability. No American city is ready to adopt the burdensome system of taxation which characterizes European countries and municipalities.

It's the Food

THE TRUE WAY TO CORRECT NERVOUS TROUBLES.

Nervous troubles are more often caused by improper food and indigestion than most people imagine. Even doctors sometimes overlook this fact. A man says:

"Until two years ago waffles and butter with meat and gravy were the main features of my breakfast. Finally dyspepsia came on and I found myself in a bad condition, worse in the morning than any other time. I would have a full, sick feeling in my stomach, with pains in my heart, sides and head.

"At times I would have no appetite for days, then I would feel ravenous, never satisfied when I did eat and so nervous I felt like shrieking at the top of my voice. I lost flesh badly and hardly knew which way to turn, until one day I bought a box of Grape-Nuts food to see if I could eat that. I tried it without telling the doctor, and liked it fine; made me feel as if I had something to eat that was satisfying and still I didn't have that heaviness that I had felt after eating any other food.

"I hadn't drank any coffee then in five weeks. I kept on with the Grape-Nuts and in a month and a half I had gained 15 pounds, could eat almost anything I wanted, didn't feel badly after eating and my nervousness was all gone. It's a pleasure to be well again."

Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich. Read the book, "The Road to Wellville," in packages. "There's a reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

"He got him!" he cried excitedly to Walker. "And it was a good shot, too!" McMillan ran out over the ice. It was an unusually fine bit of marksmanship, and he was complimenting himself on this fact for the twentieth time when, of a sudden, he stopped in horror. Lying stretched out on the ice at his feet was his game; and it was not a seal—but a man! In the upturned face he recognized an Iwiliik hunter from a neighboring Eskimo village. The man had fallen asleep while watching at a seal hole, as the Eskimos sometimes do, and McMillan's bullet had passed through his head. In the service blue-book this grim jest of fate is officially described under the caption, "The Sleeping Sealer of Fullerton."

These stories of wilderness tragedy will live; and that, perhaps, is the strangest thing about them. Many of them will live long after the names of men now famous in civilization have faded into oblivion. Such things become epic, unwritten and unrecorded, yet passing down from mouth to mouth through generations and even centuries. They are wilderness history. I have heard men of the far north speak of Jeanne D'Arcambal as though she lived but yesterday, instead of a hundred and sixty years ago. In a Frenchman's cabin far up in the Lac Bain country I first heard the story of "Father" Brochet, the Indians' friend, who, more than sixty years ago, meted the punishment of justice unto himself by hanging himself to a tree because, in a moment of excitement and to preserve his own life, he had killed a man. And throughout the country of the Lower Athabasca, if you travel there, you will still hear how Pierre Thoreau spent ten years of his life in wreaking vengeance upon the wolves, catching them alive when he could and torturing them by inches, because one terrible night a wolf pack destroyed his young wife and baby. Madness, you say. Yes—madness—but more than that in the wilderness, where men will still tell you of Thoreau, though he has been dead for a quarter of a century.

It was more than thirty years ago that Jan Gravois broke a pipe stem—and the story of what happened after

that near York Factory is a matter of wilderness history that refuses to be obliterated by the passing of time. Now and then there happen those things in the wild places, as elsewhere, in which the "devil spirit" unwittingly plays his hand against what the Crees call their "good spirit," and this was one. In a cabin in a far and lonely part of the forest Gravois lived with his young wife, and, as the story goes, they were as happy as two people could be on earth. The woman was French and beautiful, as men count beauty in that upper end of the world. In another cabin a few miles distant there lived alone a white trapper, whose infatuation for his neighbor's wife drove him to a desperate and criminal resolution, and he watched his chance. It came, one day, when Gravois started for York Factory for supplies. An hour after the husband bade his wife good-by, the trapper entered his home, and then—

Three miles away Jan Gravois stopped for a moment to load and light his pipe. It was then that the other arbiter of things—the "good spirit"—entered into the game. The pipe stem was clogged, and, in attempting to clear it, Gravois broke it short off. In the wilderness tobacco is companionship. It is next to food. There were other pipes at York Factory, twenty miles away; and there was also another pipe at the cabin, three miles away. The situation allowed of no argument. Gravois turned back. When he came to his own door, he heard strange sounds and muffled cries inside. Kicking off his snowshoes, he opened the door unobserved. A quarter of an hour later, and he would have been too late. His wife was fighting desperately. Her hair was down, her clothing was torn from her arms and shoulders, and she no longer had strength to cry out when she saw him. The story of the terrible fight that followed will be remembered for many years yet to come. When it was over, Gravois was the victor. A broken pipe stem had brought him back in time, and the enemy of his home was dead. Gravois and his wife moved farther west, and no one knows what became of them. I listened to the story while sitting a dozen paces from the spot where the dead man was buried.

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All hail the nation's fighting men,
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Hot sailors of the peerless fleet,
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