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SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE AND HIS INFLUENCE ON THE HISTORY OF THE NORTH WEST

BY

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SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE[1] AND HIS INFLUENCE ON THE HISTORY OF THE NORTH WEST.

THE first white man to reach the Pacific Ocean overland by crossing the North American continent north of the Spanish possessions was Alexander Mackenzie, a *bourgeois* or partner of the Canadian North West Company. On the face of a rock, on the shores of Bentinck Arm, at Point Menzies on the British Columbia coast, the following simple statement was inscribed:

'Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three.'

If Mackenzie had accomplished nothing else than this, his niche in the Hall of Fame would have been secure. But the discovery of the overland route to the Pacific was merely the crowning achievement of a life of hardship and adventure. Four years previous, in 1789, Mackenzie had discovered the great river which now bears his name, and had traced it from its source in the Great Slave Lake, to its outlets in the Arctic Ocean. From the time of his admission to a partnership in the fur-trading firm of Gregory and Macleod in 1785, until 1794, when he finally left the North Country for good, Mackenzie travelled many thousands of miles over the canoe routes and portages between Grand Portage on Lake Superior and the Lake of the Hills, as Lake Athabasca was then termed. But Mackenzie, though a partner in the North West Company

[1]*Bibliographical note.*

The following abbreviations have been used in the preparation of this paper, which was originally delivered before the History and Social Science Section of the Washington Educational Association at Bellingham, Wash., U.S.A.

Voyages for *Mackenzie,* Alexander.—Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the years 1789 and 1793.—London: 1801.

Davidson for *Davidson,* Charles Gordon.—The North West Company.—Berkeley, Cal., 1918.

Masson for *Masson.*—Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest.—Quebec: 1889-90.

Bryce for *Bryce, George.*—Mackenzie, Selkirk, Simpson (Makers of Canada Series).—Morang, Toronto: 1911.

and later in the so-called X Y Company, was, in his early years, by no means satisfied to remain a mere fur-trader. He could not bring himself to settle down to the hum-drum life of a trading fort. The lure of the vast unknown was upon him, and on two occasions he set out to explore the huge hinterlands of North America. On each occasion he reached an Ocean, and opened up territory hitherto unknown.

When he undertook the first of the voyages Alexander Mackenzie was only twenty-six years of age. He reached the Pacific at the age of thirty. He left the North Country, when under thirty-two years of age, with his great discoveries made. After that time the fur-trader triumphed over the explorer, and the politician over both; for Mackenzie became the focussing point for the opposition to the firm of M'Tavish, Frobisher and Company, who were the backbone of the North West Company. He was, by this time, the greatest figure next to Simon M'Tavish, 'le Marquis', in the Canadian fur-trade, but even M'Tavish's reputation was not so well known internationally as Mackenzie's.

I.

Early Days in the Fur Trade.

It will be well here to outline very briefly the early career of Alexander Mackenzie—for he did not become Sir Alexander Mackenzie until 1802, when he was knighted on account of his great achievements. He was born in 1763 at Stornaway, in the Island of Lewis, Scotland, and seems to have received a fair education, although our knowledge of the facts of his early life is very incomplete. He came to Canada at the age of sixteen, arriving in the year 1779. He attached himself to Mr. John Gregory, a Montreal merchant, with whom he tells us he remained five years.[1]

During this period 1779-1784, the Canadian fur-trade was largely in the hands of a group of traders headed by the firms of M'Tavish and Company, Todd and McGill, and Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher. These traders, representing nine distinct interests, in 1779 formed an agreement for one year,[2]

[1] *Voyages*, p. xix
[2] Davidson, p. 9.

and in 1783-4 the North West Company was founded. This Company was 'purely a partnership with transferable shares and not a chartered company,' [3] and its stock was divided into sixteen equal shares.

It so happened that two of the possible partners in the North West Company, Peter Pond and Peter Pangman, were not satisfied with the new arrangement and began to try to make other plans. Pond was at length brought back into the North West Company's fold, but Pangman entered into successful negotiations with Alexander Mackenzie's employers, Messrs. Gregory and Macleod. A rival concern was launched, and in it, at the instance of Mr. Gregory, Alexander Mackenzie became a partner.

Mackenzie proceeded at once to Grand Portage, on Lake Superior, situated about forty miles south-west of Fort William, Ontario, in American territory. Grand Portage was then the depot of the Western Canadian fur-trade, and there Mackenzie received his first assignment for the upper country trade. He was placed in charge of the outfit for English River—as the Churchill was then termed. For the opponents of the North West Company were determined to compete with their rivals throughout the entire fur-hunting territory, even as far north as Lake Athabasca.

Thus Alexander Mackenzie set off for the Northland in 1786, accompanied by his cousin, Roderick Mackenzie, and the two cousins started at once to build up a reputation as fur-traders. Alexander Mackenzie went on further into the interior than did Roderick, but each of them was very successful. One point of interest to note is how well the Mackenzies managed to get along with their rivals of the North West Company. Unfortunately Mr. Ross, who had been placed in charge of Athabasca by Mackenzie's concern, met an untimely death, as a result of an altercation with Peter Pond, who was representing the North West Company in that region.[3a]

The result of Ross's death was the amalgamation of the two rival concerns in 1787. A new North West Company was

[3a]This was the second murder case in which Pond was involved, the first being that of Waden, or Wadin, in 1780 or early in 1781, see *Voyages*, p. xvi, and Davidson, p. 41.

[3]Davidson, p. 13.

formed, including the rival company with Alexander Mackenzie as one of the new partners. Mackenzie was then sent to Athabasca, where he arrived in the autumn of 1787. Peter Pond was still nominally left in charge, but Mackenzie seems to have been the real ruler of the district.

II.

The Arctic Voyage, 1789

It was while he was in Athabasca that Mackenzie first formed his project of attempting to find his way by river to the northern ocean. It is more than probable that he expected to find the long-sought northwest passage. He certainly tells us in his *Voyages*. that 'the first voyage has settled the dubious point of a practicable North West passage; and I trust it has set that long agitated question at rest and extinguished the disputes respecting it forever.' [4] This voyage clearly showed there was no northwest passage south of 70° north latitude. Roderick Mackenzie tells us that as early as 1788 his cousin had informed him 'in confidence that he had determined on undertaking a voyage of discovery the ensuing Spring by the water communication reported to lead from Slave Lake to the Northern Ocean.' [5]

During the spring of 1789 Mackenzie was preparing for his first voyage of discovery. Accordingly he sent Roderick Mackenzie to Grand Portage in his place, and got his affairs in order for the great undertaking.

The start was finally made on the morning of June 3, 1789, from Fort Chipewyan, the new fort on Lake Athabasca, built by Roderick Mackenzie in 1788. Alexander Mackenzie's party consisted of four Canadians, one German, and two women, the wives of two of the Canadian boatmen. With them went several Indians including one known as the English chief. One of Mackenzie's most trusted henchmen, Le Roux, accompanied the party to Great Slave Lake, and was commissioned to build a fort on the northern shore of that lake.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to follow in detail the 'dash for the Arctic Sea.' The curious may find it given in full in Mackenzie's *Voyages*; and they will be found fasci-

[4] Preface, p. v.
[5] Masson, *Bourgeois*, vol. I, p. 27.

nating reading. Mackenzie was as successful as an author as he was as an explorer, and his narrative is wonderfully interesting. It begins simply thus:

'June 1789, Wednesday 3.

'We embarked at nine in the morning, at Fort Chepewyan, on the South side of the Lake of the Hills, in latitude 58.40 North and longitude 110.30 West from Greenwich, and compass has sixteen degrees variation East, in a canoe made of birch bark.'[6]

The course of the explorers was across Lake Athabasca, down Slave River to Great Slave Lake, which was reached on June 9.[7] This lake was found to be still full of ice and the mosquitoes were bad. After several days' delay Mackenzie crossed the Lake and on June 25th parted with M. Le Roux who remained behind to trade with the Indians. Four days were spent in trying to find the outlet to Great Slave Lake, and finally, on Monday, June 29th, the party entered the great river which now bears Mackenzie's name. From then on Mackenzie's course was along the river to the Arctic Sea, which was reached on July 12th, 1789.

During the voyage to the sea Mackenzie was continually on the lookout for mountain ranges, and rivers flowing from the West. Although in the *Voyages* he does not tell us definitely, it may be inferred that he was looking for a river which would take him to the Pacific, in case the newly found great river did not do so.[8] Thus he chronicles the discovery of the mouth of Liard River, which he calls the River of the Mountain, on July 1st. The next morning the Rocky Mountains were sighted. These mountains 'appeared to be sprinkled with white stones, which glistened in the sun, and were called by the Indians *manetoe aseniah*, or spirit stones.'[9] Mackenzie suspected that the white patches were talc, but as they had disappeared by the return journey he concluded that they were only snow fields which had melted as the season advanced. The mouth of the Great Bear Lake River, flowing in from the east, was passed on

[6]Mackenzie, *Voyages*, vol.I, p. 2.
[7]Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p. 7.
[8]Dr. G. C. Davidson's discovery of a new map by Mackenzie in the Colonial Office proves this. See infra.
[9]*Voyages*, p. 29.

July 5,[10] and the rapids of the Mackenzie were encountered on July 6 and 7, but proved to be of little difficulty. Three days later the party arrived at the head of the delta at the mouth of the river.

There is little evidence to show that Mackenzie realized that he had now almost arrived at the Arctic Ocean. An observation taken on July 10 showed the latitude of 67° 47′ which, as Mackenzie naïvely remarks, 'was farther North than I expected,' but he puts the blame on the variation of the compass. Although his provisions were running short, Mackenzie determined to follow the further course of the waters which he believed 'emptied themselves into the Hyperborean Sea.' He encountered difficulties with the Indians at this point, the guide appearing most unwilling to proceed further. However, Mackenzie determined to keep on, and, on July 12, reached the mouth of the middle branch of the Mackenzie River. An observation gave 69° 1′ North latitude, and it was noticed that the 'lake was quite open to the Westward,' but very shallow, so shallow that it was impossible to proceed. Apparently without knowing it, Mackenzie had arrived at the Arctic Ocean.

The party remained from July 12 to July 16 exploring the islands, including Whale Island, in the vicinity, and the appearance of the tide was noted on July 15, when it was observed that the 'water had flowed' under the baggage.[11] The next day, apparently owing to lack of provisions, Mackenzie turned back. He gives no reasons in his journal for so doing, but merely states: 'We accordingly made for the river and stemmed the current.'

The return to Fort Chipewyan was comparatively uneventful. The outstanding bit of information was obtained on July 26th from a Dog-rib Indian, who told Mackenzie that 'the Hare Indians had informed him that there was a river on the other side of the mountains to the southwest. This river was larger than the Mackenzie, and emptied into the Belhoullay Toe,[12] or White Man's Lake. The next day Mackenzie got further information about the mysterious river

[10] *Voyages*, p. 39.
[11] p. 65.
[12] Davidson, p. 56.

of the West. He met more Indians, one of whom drew him a map on the sand. Mackenzie thus describes the map:

'This singular map he immediately undertook to delineate, and accordingly traced out a very long point of land between the rivers, though without paying the least attention to their courses, which he represented as running into the great lake at the extremity of which, as he had been told by Indians of other nations, there was a *Belhoullay Couin,* or White Man's Fort. This I took to be Unalascha Fort, and consequently the river to the west to be Cook's River; and that the body of water or sea into which this river discharges itself at Whale Island, communicates with Norton Sound.' [13]

Mackenzie was unable to get this Indian, or any other, to accompany him across the mountains to the other river, which seems to have been, without doubt, either the Yukon or one of its tributaries, possibly the Porcupine. So the leader had to abandon his project and resume his journey up the Mackenzie River.

At length, on September 12th, Fort Chipewyan was again reached, after a voyage of discovery lasting one hundred and two days. Mackenzie had not reached the Pacific, but he had discovered a mighty river, and arrived at the Northern Ocean.

One of the latest writers on Mackenzie's voyages, Dr. G. C. Davidson, maintains that it is 'an interesting question whether Mackenzie realized that he had actually reached this Northern Ocean.' [14] In fact, Mackenzie calls the body of water he found there a 'lake,' and seems to suggest that it empties into the Hyperborean Sea. To be sure, he mentions the tide, but tides are indicative of inlets and arms of the ocean, as well as the ocean itself. Dr. Davidson has discovered a map in the Colonial Office on which there appears this inscription on the west side of the river: 'By the Indian Account the Sea is but a short way to the Westward.[15] Among the notes 'pinned to the map' is the following:

'Athabasca is 2750 miles to the North and West of Montreal, the distance from this to the North Sea in Latitude 69¼° North, and Longitude about 135° West from Greenwich by the Slave Lake and Mackenzie's River is 1540 miles. It

[13] *Voyages*, p. 85.
[14] Davidson, p. 59.
[15] Davidson, p. 60.

was in the summer of 1789 that I went this Expedition, in the hopes of getting into Cook's River. Though I was disappointed in this it proved without doubt that there is not a north-west passage below this latitude, and I believe it will generally be allowed that no passage is practicable in a Higher Latitude, being eternally covered with ice.' [16]

'This statement', Dr. Davidson concludes, 'indicates that Mackenzie supposed that the river which drains Great Slave Lake emptied into the Pacific Ocean.'

This certainly seems a reasonable explanation.

III.

To the Pacific by Land, 1792-3.

Three years after the first voyage Alexander Mackenzie undertook his second attempt to reach the Pacific. These intervening years had been spent for the most part in preparation for the new attempt, although Mackenzie had not been unmindful of his duties and interest as a fur-trader. In the spring of 1790 he had left Fort Chipewyan and proceeded to Grand Portage. There he was rather chagrined to find that his voyage had excited but little interest. In July of that year he wrote to Roderick Mackenzie:

'My expedition was hardly spoken of, but that is what I expected.' [17] What the *bourgeois* of the North West Company were chiefly interested in was the reorganization of the Company. In the reorganized company of twenty shares, Alexander Mackenzie held two shares, one of which he bought from MacBeath for three hundred and fifty pounds, Halifax currency, 'over and above the stock on hand.' [18]

The winter of 1791-2 was spent by Mackenzie in England, gaining the mathematical knowledge and purchasing technical equipment necessary for the new venture. During his absence the astronomer, Turner, sent out by the Hudson's Bay Company at the request of the Colonial Office, had wintered at Fort Chipewyan, and found by accurate observation the distance of Lake Athabasca from the Pacific to be not fifty leagues as

[16]Davidson, p. 61.
[17]Masson, *Bourgeois*, vol. I, p. 35.
[18]Masson, *Bourgeois*, vol. I, p. 39.

Pond had supposed, but rather over three hundred leagues. So when Alexander Mackenzie returned to Fort Chipewyan in 1792, probably the late summer or early autumn, though the exact date is not recorded, he was well equipped for his new undertaking, and he possessed a better idea of the amount of territory to be covered.

Accordingly, on October 10, 1792, leaving Roderick Mackenzie in charge of Fort Chipewyan, Alexander Mackenzie started out for his winter quarters on the Peace River. On November 1, 1792, he reached the wintering place six miles above the mouth of the Smoky River.[19] There the explorer and his party remained until spring, Mackenzie filling in time, observing the habits and customs of the Indians, attempting to get information from them concerning the land beyond the mountains, and noting all occurrences of importance in his journal.

At length, on May 8, 1793, Mackenzie despatched six canoes laden with provisions, letters, and furs, to Fort Chipewyan. The next day he and his party embarked in a single canoe for the new adventure. Mackenzie's companions on this occasion were as follows: one Scotchman, Alexander Mackay, Mackenzie's trusted lieutenant; six French Canadians, two of whom, Joseph Landry and Charles Ducette, had accompanied the chief on his previous voyage, and two Indians as hunters and interpreters. There was no guide. Apparently there was no Indian available who was acquainted with the country beyond the mountains.

Mackenzie's path to the Pacific lay along the Peace River. It was a toilsome journey, but steady progress was made. On May 12 some Indians told Mackenzie that he should reach the Rocky Mountains in ten days' time.[20] He notices in his journal for that day that the land on both sides of the river was 'very much elevated' and 'on the western side' it presented 'white, steep, and lofty cliffs.'[21] The same day an old Indian told Mackenzie of 'another large river beyond the Rocky Mountains,' and described to him 'a fork of it between the mountains.' He directed Mackenzie to take the southern

[19]Davidson, p. 63.
[20]*Voyages*, p. 157. [21]p. 158.

branch; 'from thence,' he said, 'there was a carrying place of about a day's march for a young man to get to the other river.'

By Sunday, May 19th, 1793, formidable rapids were encountered, and the party met with some danger. The canoe was injured, and had to be repaired. It looked for a while as if the rapids were insurmountable, but in the end British pluck triumphed, and the party kept on going up stream in face of obstacles which would have daunted less determined men.

At length the mountains were crossed, and on May 31 Mackenzie and his fellow-travellers arrived at the forks of the Peace River, where the Finlay from the N.N.W. and the Parsnip from the E.S.E. meet to form the main stream.[22] Mindful of the old Indian's advice, Mackenzie, much against his will, followed the southern branch. It was well he did so, for the Finlay would only have taken him to the Pacific by a much longer route and a portage to the Skeena River, which would easily have been missed. By this time the party was exhausted and disheartened, and it needed all Mackenzie's and Mackay's persistence and firmness to keep the voyageurs and Indians to their task. The crew were for following the Finlay branch, partly, apparently, because Mackenzie had determined to follow the other, but they were overruled, and the canoe proceeded up the Parsnip branch.

In face of great difficulties the explorers went on toiling up the river. It was desperate work, and we read on June 2 that 'the men were so oppressed with fatigue, that it was necessary that they should encamp at six in the afternoon.'[23] The usual day began with sunrise (or even before) and ended with sunset. For some reason Mackenzie missed the mouth of the Pack River, which would have taken him to McLeod's Lake and finally, by Summit Lake, to Giscome Portage, the natural trail across the height of land which separates the headwaters of the Peace River from the main stream of the Fraser.[24]

On June 9, some Indians appeared, who possessed iron utensils which they had, apparently, procured by intertribal

[22] *Voyages*, p. 185.
[23] *Voyages*, p. 188.
[24] See Davidson, p. 64.

trade from the Coast Indians.[25] These Indians told Mackenzie that 'he could proceed by a series of portages from the head of the Parsnip River to a small river emptying into a large one flowing towards the mid-day sun.' [26] This latter river, the Indian stated, 'did not empty itself into the sea.' [27] The river was, of course, the Fraser.

Thus encouraged, Mackenzie's party proceeded, and on June 12, 1793, reached a small lake which the explorer took to be to be the 'highest and Southermost source of the Unijah or Peace River, latitude 54° 24′ North, longitude 121° west of Greenwich.' [28]

After a short portage another river, which Simon Fraser later named the Bad River, was reached, and on June 17, after many adventures the explorers launched their canoe in the main stream of that great river, the Fraser.[29] Two days later, on June 19, the mouth of the Nechaco River was passed, apparently unnoticed. As the weather was foggy, Mackenzie can probably be excused for his failure to discover the most obvious route to the Pacific via the Nechaco River, Fraser Lake and Burns Lake to the Bulkeley and Skeena Rivers (i.e., following the line of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway from Fort George to the mouth of the Skeena).

On June 21, some new information was obtained from a band of Carrier Indians who, at first, seemed extremely hostile, but were soon pacified by the present of some beads, looking glasses, 'and other alluring trinkets.' [30] The Indians' account of the Fraser was sufficiently terrible to cause even Mackenzie some alarm.

'According to their account,' he states, [31] 'this river, whose course is very extensive, runs towards the mid-day sun; and that at its mouth, as they had been informed, white men were building houses. They represented its current to be uniformly strong, and that in three places it was altogether impassable from the falls and rapids, which poured along between perpendicular rocks that were much higher, and more rugged,

[25] *Voyages*, pp. 198-201.
[26] Davidson, p. 65, based on *Voyages*, pp. 203-4.
[27] *Voyages*, p. 204. [28] *Voyages*, p. 216.
[29] *Voyages*, p. 228. [30] *Voyages*, p. 244. [31] *Voyages*, p. 245.

than any we had yet seen, and would not admit of any passage over them.'

Fortunately for Mackenzie the Indians were able to inform him that there was another route to the sea, much more direct and less difficult. Mackenzie was naturally loath to abandon his progress down the great river, which he later, on August 16 on his return, called by the Indian name the Tacoutche Tesse and falsely identified with the Columbia River. But the season was advancing, and supplies were short.[32] Above all Mackenzie knew that he had to recross the mountains and brave once more the known dangers of the Peace River before the fall of winter. It was a long way back to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca.

Accordingly, on June 23, the bow of the much-battered canoe was turned up-stream, and on July 3 the party arrived at the mouth of a river running in from the west. This river, now known as the Blackwater, was termed by Mackenzie the West Road River. Along it the canoe made its way for a short distance, when it was decided to abandon the water route and proceed by foot overland.[33] This was accordingly done, and a long march began which ended on July 17, when the upper waters of the Bella Coola River were reached. The next day, July 18, two canoes were obtained from the Indians, and the party began the last lap of the long journey to the Pacific.

On the 19th Mackenzie visited the great chief of the Bella Coola region, further progress having for the moment been stopped by the curiosity of the natives. The chief was laid up with a pain in his chest, which Mackenzie promptly relieved by giving him a few drops of Turlington's Balsam on a piece of sugar. The chief was much gratified and later presented Mackenzie with a roasted salmon. He showed the explorer his treasures, 'a garment of blue cloth, decorated with brass buttons, and another of a flowered cotton,' [34] which Mackenzie took to be Spanish. There was also any amount of copper and brass and iron in the possession of the chief and his warriors. Mackenzie thus describes their treasures: [35]

[32]He had no more than 30 days' provisions remaining, and only 150 rounds of ball ammunition and 30 pounds of powder; *ibid.*, pp. 255-6.
[33]*ibid.*, p. 284, July 4.
[34]p. 333. [35]pp. 333-4.

'Copper and brass are in great estimation among them, and of the former they have great plenty; they point their arrows and spears with it, and work it up into personal ornaments, such as collars, ear-rings, and bracelets, which they wear on their wrists, arms and legs. I presume that they find it the most advantageous article to trade with the more inland tribes. They also abound in iron. I saw some of their twisted collars of that metal which weighed upwards of twelve pounds. It is generally beat in bars of fourteen inches in length, and one inch three quarters wide. The brass is in thin squares. Their copper is in larger pieces and some of it appeared to be old stills cut up. They have various trinkets, but their iron is manufactured only into poniards and daggers. Some of the former have very neat handles, with a silver coin of a quarter or eighth of a dollar fixed on the end of them. The blades of the latter are from ten to twelve inches in length, and about four inches broad at the top, from which they gradually lessen into a point.'

After this visit to the chief Mackenzie and his party resumed their voyage, and finally, on July 21, they reached Bentinck Arm and Point Menzies, and there, on July 22, Mackenzie recorded on the South East face of the rock on which the party had slept the night,[36] surrounded by none too friendly Indians, the brief inscription already quoted.[37] The long journey was over. The Pacific had been reached overland from Canada.

The return journey began at once on July 23, and on August 4 the Fraser River was again reached. Thirteen days later, August 17, the party was again on the waters of the Parsnip, and on the main stream of the Peace by August 19. Finally, on August 24, Mackenzie and his fellow-voyagers were back at the Fort where they had spent the winter, and from which they had started the 9th of May.

Mackenzie concludes the narrative of his *Voyages* thus simply:[38]

'. . . Here my voyages of discovery terminate. Their toils and their dangers, their solicitudes and sufferings, have

[36]This encampment Mackenzie named 'Porcupine Cove.'
[37]*Supra*, p. 411. [38]p. 397.

not been exaggerated in my description. On the contrary, in many instances, language has failed me in the attempt to describe them. I received, however, the reward of my labours, for they were crowned with success.

'As I have now resumed the character of a trader, I shall not trouble my readers with any subsequent concern, but content myself with the closing information that, after an absence of eleven months, I arrived at Fort Chipewyan, where I remained for the purposes of trade, during the succeeding winter.'

Thus simply ends the account of one of the greatest voyages of discovery ever made.

IV.

Later Days and Death.

Mackenzie, the fur-trader, now again takes the place of Mackenzie, the explorer, and little remains to be told. In the spring of 1794, Mackenzie left Fort Chipewyan for Grand Portage, and never again returned to the North Country.

At Grand Portage Mackenzie found that the affairs of the North West Company were very unsettled. Some of the Montreal traders headed by Forsyth, Richardson and Company, were ready to break away from the parent company and to form a new North West Company. This was done in 1795-6, and the so-called X Y Company was established. Alexander Mackenzie, although on bad terms with Simon M'Tavish of M'Tavish, Frobisher and Company, remained with the old Company until 1799, when the engagement between Mackenzie and the Company expired and was not renewed.[39]

In that year Mackenzie retired to England, where his *Voyages* appeared in 1801. He was knighted in 1802, and in the same year he brought forward a scheme for forming civil and military establishments at Nootka, also on the Columbia River and at Sea Otter Harbour, in 55° North latitude. These schemes came to nought, and Mackenzie returned to Canada in 1802 to place himself at the head of the opposition to the

[39]Masson, *Bourgeois*, vol. I, p. 48.

North West Company. The new North West Company, known as 'Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company' or the 'X Y Company', was fighting for life against M'Tavish's old North West Company. Bitter rivalry between the two companies continued until M'Tavish's death in 1804, when a reunion took place. Of the one hundred shares in the reunited company, twenty-five, or one-quarter, were assigned to the X. Y. Company.

In 1808 Sir Alexander Mackenzie left Canada for good, and returned to Scotland. Four or five years later [40] he married a namesake of his, Miss Geddes Mackenzie. Lady Mackenzie was the owner, in her own right, of the property of Avoch and this property she made over to her husband.

Mackenzie's death occurred very suddenly in 1820, at the early age of fifty-seven. He was taken ill when travelling from London to Perthshire, and died at Mulnain in that county on March 12, 1820.

V.

General Estimate of Mackenzie. His influence on North West History.

Mackenzie had done great things for North West America. His journeys had led him to two oceans, and he had demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt, that there was no North West Passage south of 70° North Latitude. He had proved that the mythical Strait of Anian, which was supposed to connect the Pacific Ocean and Hudson's Bay, had no possible existence. He had opened up Territories hitherto unknown, and had discovered two mighty rivers—the Mackenzie and the Fraser, and had traced the former to its outlet in the Frozen Ocean.

But all this he did as a fur trader, and not as an official of the British Crown. It is noteworthy that he never took possession of the Territories he discovered in the name of His Majesty, King George III. He possessed no Royal Warrant for that purpose, although his unsuccessful attempt in 1802 to interest the British people in his scheme for forming civil

[40] 1813; so Masson; 1812 according to Bryce, p. 101.

and military establishments on the Columbia River at Nootka, seems to show that he was alive to the necessity of establishing British rights of sovereignty on the North West Coast.

Mackenzie's exploration, and the publication of the *Voyages* in 1801, aroused much interest concerning North West America. We are told by Bryce[41] that Napoleon had a copy of the *Voyages* smuggled into France, and translated for the perusal of Marshal Bernadotte. The Corsican was at this time dreaming of a great American Empire, and he was planning to entrust to Bernadotte the task of establishing the Tricolour in North West America and of attacking Canada from the rear. Fortunately for North America these schemes came to nought, but Bernadotte years after confessed that he could, for a time, almost fancy himself 'Taking your Canada *en revers* from the upper waters.' [42] Nor was Bernadotte alone influenced by the narrative. Lord Selkirk also has left on record his debt to Mackenzie's *Voyages*. It was from this book that the founder of the Red River Settlement admitted that he first obtained information concerning Rupert's Land.

But above all, the exploration of Sir Alexander Mackenzie prepared the way for the journeys of Simon Fraser and David Thompson, both employees of the North West Company.

Fraser in 1805 founded the first fort west of the Rocky Mountains, and in 1806 explored the headwaters of the Parsnip River, crossed the height of land to the Bad River, and reached the North Fork of the Great River which he, like Mackenzie, took to be the Columbia, but really is the Fraser. This he followed to the junction of the Nechako River, where one year later he founded Fort George. Thence he proceeded up the Nechaco and Stuart Rivers and Stuart Lake. As far as the junction of the Nechaco and the Fraser Rivers, Simon Fraser was following Mackenzie's course and he took almost malicious pleasure in pointing out errors in Sir Alexander's narrative. Fraser discovered the South Fork of the Fraser River on their journey, and prided himself not a little that Mackenzie had missed it. In his journal he recorded his feelings as follows: 'This river is not mentioned by Sir A. M. K. which surprises me not a little, it being full

[41]Bryce, pp. 94-7. [42]*ibid.*, p. 97.

in sight and a fine large river, and in the state we saw it, equal in size to that of the Athabasca River, and forms what Mr. McDougall in his journal of last Spring calls the Great Fork. It flows in from the right, and as far as I can judge, about 10 or 12 miles above the first Portage. Sir A. M. K. appears to have been very inaccurate in the courses, or there must have been a vast difference in the compass he made use of, and the one we had, which is old and perhaps not very good.' [43]

Two years later in 1808 Fraser made his celebrated descent of the Great River and ascertained that it was not the Columbia. How he managed to brave the dangers of the cañons of the Fraser will always remain a source of wonder to subsequent generations. In his journal he describes how he and his party took their lives in their hands and shot the Great Cañon in their canoes. At length the calmer waters of the lower Fraser were reached, and on July 2, 1808, the party reached the site of the present city of New Westminster. A few hours later Simon Fraser came in sight of a gulf or bay of the sea which the Indians called Pas-hil-roe, and which has been identified as the Gulf of Georgia. At that point hostile Indians were encountered and the exploring party turned back. Fraser was deeply disappointed that he did not see the Main Ocean, but he had explored a mighty river and traced its course to its mouth.

David Thompson, a fellow-employee of the North West Company, was at this time tracing the course of the Columbia River and its Tributaries. In 1807, the year before Fraser's descent of the Great River, Thompson had built 'Kootanae Hause' on the upper waters of the Columbia. During the next two years he explored the Kootenay River and established posts on the Flathead and Pend d' Oreille Lakes. In 1811 he endeavoured to forestall the Astorians in their attempt to found a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River, but failed. He arrived at Astoria on July 15, 1811, only to find the Pacific Company in possession.

But in the meantime the North West Company had not been idle in the territories through which Sir Alexander Mackenzie had blazed the way in 1793. Forts had been

[43]Quoted by Howay and Scholefield, *British Columbia*, vol. I, pp. 247-8.

founded at McLeod Lake in 1805, Fort St. James on Stuart Lake in 1806, Fort Fraser, 1806, and Fort George, 1807. Mackenzie's Company was well established in this Northern region to which the name of New Caledonia was given. These forts formed the bases of a profitable trade with the Indians, and showed that the explorations of Sir Alexander Mackenzie had opened up a new world beyond the Rockies to Canadian fur-traders.

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