PRENTICE G. DOWNES

Selections From His Writings

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PRENTICE GILBERT DOWNES

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INTRODUCTION

In the late fall of 1959 the Executive Committee of the Belmont Hill School voted to arrange for the publication of this modest volume in memory of Prentice Gilbert Downes. It was immediately evident to the Committee that the most fitting and useful tribute to the man and his work must inevitably consist of a compendium of selections from his not inconspicuous literary bequest. It was felt strongly that P. G. Downes ought to speak for himself, that in the case of a man so talented there seemed no need for others to pronounce eulogies. Cognizant of that charge we have tried to achieve some reasonable compromise with what often appeared to be an endless variety of material.

The proliferation of P. G. Downes' writings, both published and unpublished, vastly complicated the problem of choice, and it seemed impossible to escape the pitfalls of the arbitrary. Our selections, of necessity, have been random, but we think, representative. From the beginning we asked ourselves what purpose this booklet ought to serve for the alumni and friends of Belmont Hill. And we felt on reflection that if it should renew the image of a man whose most vital contribution to a generation of young people may well have been his example of intelligent non-conformity; if it should recall for some P. G. Downes' persistent concern that the unexamined life is not worth living; if it should restore a momentary glimpse of that rare, tenacious individuality which pervaded every aspect of his life, that is more than adequate recompense for the effort that has been expended: Finally, we are struck again and again, as you will be who stop to read these fragments of his legacy, that P. G. Downes was no ordinary man.

– F. C. Calder

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Sometime early in 1959 Mr. Downes was asked by Maitland A. Edey, a former Kent School classmate, to submit a few autobiographical remarks on the occasion of his thirtieth reunion year. Although he had until recently deplored "the absurdity of these tabular biographies," Mr. Downes was prompted to respond to Mr. Edey's request on 11 April, 1959. The following is the complete autobiographical excerpt from his personal correspondence.

One spring day in 1928 I remember looking out of the window in the east end room of the old main building on the second floor. It was a wonderful warm day before baseball, with all its grim and tense absorptions, its fears and frustrations, had started, and I remember now, after 31 years saying to myself; Well, I guess I shall never be so happy again. I suppose that is when I left Kent. I followed this with a year as a teacher and coach at the Rectory School in order to earn enough money to go to Harvard. My father, like Sill, had sort of a theo-economy whose postulate was that God would provide all. Neither ever explained to me the penance necessary for the provision. That year was a bizarre Alice-in-Wonderland of pedagogy. Harvard College was to me at least a wondrous buffet; you must remember that I was one so fortunate as to feed at that groaning table of diversity and brilliance in the waning years of Lowell and before the sallow, desiccated do-goodedness and organization of Conant with one lobe of his brain on chloro-

phyl and the other with the mission to educate perforce. Those years were intertwined with many things such as boxing in Boston as an amateur which carried with it tatooing parlors, linament, knowing the pros in this bizarre business and the illusion of being in some sort of miniscule way part of life. Simultaneously I coached at a school in Brookline and had all sorts of jobs some of which led to very happy experiences, goose-shooting on Martha's Vineyard, salmon fishing in New Brunswick, cruising in a schooner off Nova Scotia; so many, so many. The last year there even provided a romantic, unrequited love affair which in all the proper drama for that time in your life, that brief flash when you dare to really feel anything, was terminated by a train accident. Emotional fossils in this life are more preserved than one admits.

After that, now 1933, I got a job teaching and coaching at Belmont Hill School, an admirable institution being a day-school, human, full of aspiration, pragmatic, with students concerned with actually learning something rather than being types; this was before the triumph of the organizational man. Each summer for more than a decade I travelled into the far north. This became something of an obsession with me. I liked that life and I liked the people there. I saw a lot of it just as the old north was vanishing; the north of no time, of game, of Indians, Eskimoes, of unlimited space and freedom. I always set out alone and I experienced most of the big lakes and rivers; Great Bear, the Slave, the Mackenzie, the Yukon, the Barrens, Labrador, Baffin Island, Ellsmere. I remember one time after a dreadful trip, camping on the edge of the tree line, again it was one of those indescribable smokey, bright-hazy days one sometimes gets in the high latitudes. I had hit the

caribou migration and there was lots of meat; it was a curious spot for all the horizon seemed to fall away from where I squatted and I said to myself; Well, I suppose I shall never be so happy again. That is when I left the north because as you must know by now, and that is why these tabular biographies are so absurd—you leave places and things not by date or physically but emotionally.

Out of all these years have come a book and portions of others: *Sleeping Island, North of 55°, Profiles from Notable Modern Biographies, Not By Bread Alone,* the first by me, the second *in parte ipse,* the latter two about me *in parte*. Obscure articles in even more obscure journals such as *"The Physiography of the Region about the Magnetic Pole"*, or last year's *"John Tanner, Captive of the Wilderness"*, reviews here and there, are still spawned on occasion. I have been back to the far north twice since the war; once, sort of a dream trip, alone, just visiting Indians I know, and once on an investigation of volcanoes in Alaska and the Aleutians for a government agency. On this latter my Kent School training for the first and only time intruded for I was in company with a mad man and had a wonderful opportunity to kill him, but those old school inhibitions interposed. I could almost hear the 'Old Man' from somewhere bawling at me: "Get off the gwass!"

In 1941 I married a marvelously tempestuous and talented person. During the two wars, our own and the global one, I worked in Washington for the Corps of Engineers on contract to the Air Force. I have no shy allusions to that. Our job, which I ran, was to make certain maps for the butchering of as many hapless people as technically possible, thoroughly democratic you understand for there was no discrimi-

nation as to race, color or creed. I have no illusions of happiness of this now nor did I then. The two wars I mention ended concurrently and I went up to an old farm of mine in Vermont. I led a Joel Pratt life for a half year and once again I was very happy, but there is not enough game in Vermont and I became a medical curiosity, a modern day scurvy case. This brought me back to Boston and I worked at Harvard for an old friend, Dr. Erwin Raisz, the greatest living cartographer. Then, somehow, and quite casually, I was back at Belmont Hill teaching again and if my approach to history, geology and hockey have been oblique, they at least have been tolerated.

I married again, most felicitously, in 1949; no more wars, rather two very dear children.

For over a year now I have been ransacking county court houses, historical collections and libraries throughout the middle west, tracking down a boy who was captured by northern Indians in Kentucky in 1789. He has proved the best friend I have ever had; you see, when you live as long as I, you can live backwards or forwards, or more conventionally not at all. I was driving back from Kentucky last fall to Wisconsin where we spend a lot of time now, rushing along through southeastern Indiana, there was a high southwest wind and all the sere tall corn was streaming and I heard a strange sound, a high ziffling, intimate noise, and at that instant I knew it was all just the same as that spring day in the old building in 1928, or in the north when I used to hear the drums for the next day's hunt in the Barrens, or in the first soft snow in Vermont—or maybe in your requested world a Hedrick stopping a shell so he could get a drink of water, or a Zip Sloan decapitating flies because he was the Lost Dauphin, or a Mitchell making

a marvelous run in an intra-mural game from a crazy split formation, or the tieing goal against Hotchkiss, or any of those thousands of things, and who is to say what is important?

But I am weary of the lovely, smooth mud-pack whether fashioned by Madison Avenue, or good Ol' Ike, or good Ol' reversed collar or whatever stripe of soft-sell authoritarian. You might consider the observation of a fellow townsman of mine sometime back, whose great-grandsons I have taught, fellow named Emerson. One day, one April day, he was walking around Fresh Pond and he observed: "After much wandering and seeing many things, four snakes gliding up and down a hollow for no purpose that I could see—not to eat, not for love, but only gliding..."

FIRST COMERS

We are indebted to the Ryerson Press for permission to reproduce from North of 55° *(Toronto, 1954) P. G. Downes' chapter, "First Comers."* North of 55°, *a collection of essays on the far north, resulted from the combined efforts of some sixteen contributory authors. Mr. Downes was asked to comment on the great saga of early northern explorations. The complete chapter follows.*

No other comparable area of the earth's surface presents such an extraordinary record of sustained exploration as Canada north of 55°. Where else may one find an articulate record of nearly four hundred years and yet a record still far from complete? It is like a vast and intricate tapestry of which the fabric, though limited by an ultimate framework, bears within itself both complex and simple designs, in which some of the individual threads are worn and dim and yet others are live and glowing. These patterns of human endeavour and accomplishment follow the most wondrous convolutions of the human spirit and regardless of their brevity, length and colour, contribute each to the grand design, the completion of which still awaits generations to come.

As you look back through the centuries, you will find that this mighty epic is a truly staggering edifice of the written word, and yet even this is but a small fragment of the total story. You will find also that it is really a distilled and particular reflection of the whole historical drama of western European civilza-

tion in these same four hundred years. Like that too, though displaced in time, there is an immense chronological substructure which you can but dimly see and which in large part still remains to be uncovered. The exploration of this vast and silent area is known to us today only since the first voyage of Frobisher in 1576. Before that, however, lies an enormous period of time in which its secrets were probed and revealed with quite as heroic human effort, fear, triumph and despair.

Conservatively, for at least five thousand years someone has been exploring some part of Canada's far north. That the written evidence does not exist does not deny the fact nor the human struggle. It is curious justice that now, as the obvious geographical exploration is drawing to a finite close, this other end of the historical record is at the dawn of its real revelation.

Though the story of the thousands of years of exploring before the white man is dim indeed, traces do exist and the sequence of this truly first, great man-adventure into the huge new world of taiga * and tundra is only now beginning to be understood. Ironically, the instrument for this has, within the last six years, sprung directly from that devised to destroy man in the Asiatic fastness somewhere from which he came to the new world. The Carbon-14 technique through which the archaeologist may discover the accurate and dated history of the yesterday is a step-child of the atomic bomb.

* Taiga is the swampy region of coniferous forest south of the tundra.

Whose eyes were those which first searched the crumbling, rotting mass of the great continental ice-sheet? Whose hands fashioned arrow point and spear? Whence did he come into the ever-widening forest and barrens of the Canadian north after his first crossing of the Bering Sea land-bridge? Were his words those of the Athapascan, the Algonkian, the Eskimoan tongues we know today? Was he of a ghost legion whose only memorials are the strange, fluted arrow points mixed with extinct species of bison, sloth or mammoth? These threads in the tapestry await the interpretation of searchers of the North to come. The evidence is there, and probably every white explorer since - whether he has travelled the great river routes by canoe, or the horizon-bound barrens by foot, whether stepped ashore from His or Her Majesty's ship, or has been today gently eased from a helicopter - sooner or later, from the mute witness of a few blackened hearth stones, a splinter of quartz, or the elaborate foundations of a "Tunit" ruin, has said to himself, "Someone has been here before me."

Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of the whole great saga is exactly this persistent phrase. The deeper one probes, the more insistent the refrain for, in the way of the human ego, fame and credit adhere only in proportion to the preserved and published record, not in the actuality of the accomplishment. No better example of this do we find than in our accepted "first" into this area. For behind Martin Frobisher's trips to "Meta Incognita," Baffin Island, lurk the shadowy ghosts of the Norseman Karlsefni and his followers almost six hundred years before.

But it is with Frobisher of 1576-8 that the drama, as we presently understand it in detail, unfolds, and it is in his three voyages that we can see the outline

of the larger design to be followed in part or whole for roughly the next two hundred years. First, there is the beckoning, golden illusion so tempting to a vigorous post-Renaissance, maritime Europe: a western route to Cathay, China, Japan, the Spice Isles, India. Second is the claiming and charting of those new islands and land masses, the new world itself, which were found obstructing the pursuit of the dream. Third occurs the alternating economic underwriting of the dream by private and sovereign subsidy; and last, in the disillusionment of the dream, the effort to salvage some tangible reward. All of this is still valid today; only the mechanics have changed, and the dream and the fact have been realized.

If today those ancient Odysseys, preserved in antique rhetoric have taken unto themselves a legendary, fairy-story and heroic unreality - Frobisher in his tiny Gabriel, Davis in his thirty-five ton Moonshine, Weymouth, Henry Hudson, Button, Baffin, Bylot, Foxe and James - the simple truth is that they were just that. They were heroes. They chose to seek a challenge clothed not in the verdure and warmth of a Caribbean main, nor the gentle slope of a mid-Atlantic coastal plain, but killing cold and the jagged coastal battlements of a thousand mile Baffin Island range, or the grim Torngats of Labrador rising straight from the sea in repelling, sombre grandeur.

If you think we are being unfashionably romantic, go to Churchill, Manitoba today. Gaze out over the sullen, grey sea. Project yourself backward three hundred and thirty-four years. The bitter winter has passed. One-by-one sixty of your shipmates have died festering with scurvy, exposure, gangrenous frost-bite. Three only of you are left. No other human being has even been seen in this barren,

empty, aching land. Yet, you still have the courage to embark in a boat not much larger than a sailing dory and you sail it all the way back to Denmark; but not before you were able to write in your journal: "Herewith, goodnight to all the world; and my soul in the hand of God - Jens Munck."

The Great Dream, a practical northwest passage, lingered on well into the middle of the eighteenth century. In the latter half, the first real concept of the staggering immensity of the great northern continental barrier was established. Many and singular designs and threads had been woven into our tapestry from the high tide of Elizabethan adventure to the more prosaic mercantilism of the Georges. At our selected moment, now, almost exactly a century has passed since those volatile and agile "Caesars of the Wilderness," DesGroseilliers and Radisson had seduced "the Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay" to permanent lodgement on those low, mosquito-ridden shores. One hundred years, and still no one knew what really lay within the continental arc north of 55°.*

It is as if by dramatic connivance of the fates that this great age of white exploration should be terminated with the unlocking of the interior, the ending of the dream, and the most brilliant individual performance in all North American exploration. There is a certain poetic justice, too, that its author should

* The explorations of Henry Kelsey (1690-92), the LaVerendryes (1732-49), Anthony Henday (1754) and William Stewart (1714-15) were in the first three cases south of our area and in the latter no exact geographical data are known.

be a servant of the Great Company even at that moment embarking upon its second century of continuous operation in the north.

On July 17, 1771, Samuel Hearne, after two abortive attempts, each in themselves remarkable exploratory feats, stood on the polar rim of the continent. On foot, in company with his Chipewyan-Cree friend and guide Matonabbee, this lone and resolute white man had traversed the mysterious, unknown, immense world of the far northern land-mass. No matter his faulty astronomical observations, to this hour Hearne's trip from present day Churchill to the mouth of the Coppermine River and back again remains the most remarkable exploratory achievement by a single individual in the new world. To this very day, portions of that track still await the foot of the next white man. From that day to this, the duplication of even fragments of his trek has been sufficient to bring fame and renown to lesser men. It is fitting, too, that his first public notice should have occurred with the delineation of the northwestern continental margin by that master of the global seas, Captain Cook.

But now, great events had taken place "outside," and in the far north the shadows of things to come are more often the reflections of things which have passed. New France had bowed to Britain, and the southern approaches now open, a trickle and then a flood of adventurers from Montreal pressed northward into the fur-rich, virgin wilderness of the high latitude forests. It was these men who were to hesitantly coalesce into the North West Company out of whose bitter economic struggle with the Hudson's Bay Company not only great explorations in themselves developed but the logistic mechanics for those of others.

First into the new sub-arctic arena was the irascible Peter Pond, no ordinary fur trader but one who had been touched with the dream. There, at the delta of the Athabasca in 1778, he laid the plans which Alexander Mackenzie translated into geographic reality, the exploration of the River of Disappointment - the Mackenzie - in 1789, and the first crossing of the continent four years later. But even here, ghosts linger, for back of these two hover the dim figure of a "Lewis Primo" (Louis Primeau) and a Francois Beaulieu whom time and silence have almost buried. Out of this struggle grew the surveys of Turnor, Fidler and Thompson, fixed for all time upon the constantly revised and increasingly detailed map of the indefatigable Arrowsmith far away in London. Out of this were born the permanent bases from and to which far northern adventurers have set forth and returned down to the present day.

With the first half of the nineteenth century, the assault takes a different cast both in objective, locale, mode and genesis. It is this age which even today colours much of the popular concept of the north. For this was the turn of truly Arctic exploration. Popular appeal was still attracted by the magic words "Northwest Passage" but the real motivation was much more within the framework of the age itself. This was the period of western culture when science, as we know it today, was first in the ascendant, and particularly it was that phase in which infant science was not only supremely confident in its discovery of the rational and logical, but was omnivorous in its appetite for physical evidence from which to prove its budding hypotheses and from which to create new ones. It was the age of great collecting - be it animal, vegetable, mineral, vocabularies, customs or cartographic outlines of coast and cape. The north

supplied wonderfully well this challenge that all physical matter, above, under, and on the earth, be known and classified. Out of this were born the elaborate ventures sponsored in the main by the British Admiralty under its secretary Sir John Barrow, and out of it came much of our basic knowledge of Canada north of 55° particularly where washed by the Polar Sea.

One hesitates to single out expeditions or individuals. Every degree of human strength, weakness, wisdom or folly was to play its part until in an ironical fashion, with the prize at hand, this age was to reach an apogee of profound and dramatic tragedy.

Today, as one reads back through the famous narratives of Ross, Parry, Franklin, Richardson and Back, one is again and again confronted with formidable tables of meteorological data, soundings, lists of plants, insects, birds, fish, lichens and always another beautifully engraved line on the map, another cape, another bay, another inlet; collecting, collecting, collecting, no only bringing piece-meal the physical environment of the North back to the Admiralty and thence to the Royal Society, but in the process lugging the bulky and rigid environment of the Admiralty and Royal Society to the Arctic. Unable to duplicate, or ignoring, the lessons of the fur-trader explorers Dease and Simpson, with their genius for speed and adaptation, sooner or later this literal translation of what man in his new-found, scientific logic conceived as ultimate was bound to destroy him in the fact of the remarkably illogical behaviour of the far North itself.

The grand and dreadful climax was reached accompanied by all the overtones and even the geo-

graphic backdrop which the most exacting playwright might conceive: the disaster of the third Franklin expedition in 1845-8: the total disappearance of its 129 men. Twelve years of frenetic search followed. At first, dedicated to possible rescue, it then became determination to know what had happened. Some thirty-eight individual and collective enterprises involving every sea, land, ice and snow transportation technique then known to science, the naval arts, the practical wisdom of fur-trader and native was utilized by one or the other of them with a successful blending of the latter in Rae and a sharing of the former in McClintock finally solving the riddle. In many ways this fatal gesture of man against the Arctic was to establish a stereotype and picture, to give substance to a great, popular nightmare which explorers themselves had bit by bit projected. It had every element out of which whole mass illusions are created: an experienced, peerless leader, the confidence and might of a great and at times arrogant officialdom, the best that science could provide, and then: the goal within grasp, mystery, disappearance, ice, cold, the long arctic night, silence, desperate men, starvation, fearful natives, the struggle: now a few fragments, rumours of cannibalism, the ultimate sacrifice to the great dream, even the names of the ships themselves, H.M.S. Erebus, H.M.S. Terror.

With the closing of the drama in 1859, once again a new phase commences. This too, reflects far greater drives and interests than the locale suggests. Again, as in all the previous transitions, remnants of the preceding period still persist as the focus alters. The industrial age asserts itself in the increased change-over to steam. Growing competitive nationalisms, in prestige, if no longer in imperialism, are mirrored in the international race for the pole as into

the Polar Basin press the flags of the United States, Norway as well as Britain and finally the emergence of Canada itself as sponsor in its own right of exploration. It is within this chronological framework that one finds the manifold expressions of civilization, ultimately sedentary, essentially restraining, fastening upon a fluctuating environment and a nomadic people - missionaries, the police. This was the era of the first, great geological surveys with economic utilization their hope and the intelligent blending of proven indigenous travel methods their instrument. Dawson and McConnell in the Yukon, and Dawson also in northern British Columbia, Tyrrell across the Barrens, Low in the Labrador Peninsula - in their admirable integrity, they paid meticulous credit to their fur-trader precursors, McLeod, Campbell, Hearne, Hendry, and McLean while bringing to their country the basic information from which its strength and wealth is even now but beginning to be tapped.

It is near the close of this 19th century and the opening of the new that one glimpses a curious contributing figure, the lone rebel to the urban, industrial age of utilization, the sportsman-explorer such as Whitney, Pike or Hanbury paradoxically hastening the very thing against which he is in revolt. In different category, but significant too, was the pioneer precision and efficiency of Douglas or the expression of independent theory, leading back to the ice-hunting stratum of antiquity itself, in Stefansson. The old dream, too, was laid to rest with Amundsen (1903-6) actually sailing the Northwest Passage in the Gjoa.

Since 1918, the patterns again emerge consonant with the larger cultural forms of the western world of which the far north is but a microcosm. Pre-emi-

nently now are utilization and mechanical adaptation and all the shifting, varied constellations of a relativistic rather than finite and limited scientific concept. Today the helicopter hovers over Hearne's vanished footsteps. The vitamin replaces the whitefish, tri-metragon photography the straining eye. The Rorschach Test and psychoanalysis are creeping north to supplant the notebook of a Dr. Richardson or an Abbe Petitot. Caribou become desirable for their zygotic parasites rather than their possibility of pemmican. The simple distinctions of "primitive" and limestone rocks have become subject to the diamond drill, gravity anomalies and unbelievably complicated structural petrology. The very atmosphere itself, a century ago so carefully catalogued for its snow crystals, its simple refractions, its sundogs and the play of the aurora, is now tapped for microscopic specks of pollen and sub-microscopic cosmic rays. This is the nature of things. The mysteries will always be there. It is simply within the limits of the searcher's knowledge that exploration of the north may ever end.

One cannot leave this fragmental glimpse of the great quest without a lingering speculation as to what manner of men were these. For in all this pageant, something within himself draws forth the explorer from those who stay behind. Through the enormous record there are surprisingly few hints other than the most obvious and possibly least vital. It is as if there was a realization that the vastness of the natural world was too overpowering, too humbling to countenance the projection of the personal inner being. Yet, to him who seeks, there are glimpses; for these were and are each living out his destiny as only he could so do. The almost mystical religiosity of Captain James, the mercurial, wonderful egotism of Radisson,

the dogged faithfulness to duty of Hearne, the truly global dreams of Pond, the grasp of economic structure of Mackenzie, the rigidity to naval tradition of Franklin, the fractious petulance of McLean, the buoyant elan of Hanbury, the self-effacing integrity of Tyrrell, the calm assurance of todays' flying personnel, all of this and much more awaits the re-living and reinterpretation of Canadians for generations to come. The far north is there—waiting. The record is here to read. It is still to be finished, the exploration of the future, the discovery of the past.

What drew them onward? All the desires, wishes, hopes, despairs that men share with each other and with their time. Their reward? To some it was fame, to others oblivion, to all the quiet satisfaction of a challenge overcome, and to a few, perhaps, the realization of the words of the Eskimo, Igjugarjuk:

"All true wisdom is to be found far from the dwellings of men. . . . "

A TALE OF THE NORTH

A composer of short stories in his spare time, Mr. Downes has left two unpublished volumes containing some thirty or forty tales of the North. We have selected one of Mr. Downes' favorites from his collection Atchimo, *entitled "Two Women." "The Foreward" which precedes, belongs to the same anthology.*

I should like to say a word or two. Possibly an introduction to a group of short stories is in bad literary taste but I have them very much on my mind and I should like to forestall some inevitable criticism of them.

These stories have come to me either as personal experiences or as related to me by companions and acquaintances, native and white men, hunter, prospector, fur trader or wanderer in the north; north of fifty three. They point or paint no moral. The incident is often very slight. Their only coherence is that they are each and all of that tremendous, timeless, lonely land. Many of these tales still live in the country whence they came for they are the stories of the campfire and the meetings of old friends. The actors in many of them still live, and though I know they will no doubt never read these tales, I have felt a nicety about being too definite in some cases as to place and name.

Much has been written of this country in the heroic vein. These pages are not of that, but a humbler, homelier scale.

Sometimes when the summer sun is warm and the summer nights are soft and when one's luck has been good, you may have the fortune to sit by a small fire with a fine old Cree who is renowned as a story teller. Then you will boil up the kettle, share your tobacco pouch, and ask the old man very respectfully;

"Nimosom, atchimo....?"
"Grandfather, tell me a story...?"

And if you are favoured, the old man will sit thinking by the firelight and maybe, after a long pause, he will begin:

"Kyass....kyass,"
"Long, long ago...."
"This is the North of this small book.

TWO WOMEN

That was a wild night when I pulled into Little Lake Post just ahead of the storm. It has taken us the entire afternoon to creep around the lee shore of the lake. As our canoe grounded on the sandy beach in front of the trading post it was already dark, and the lighted windows of the manager's small white house stood out cheery and inviting in the fast gathering darkness.

We quickly drew up the canoe and turned it over, tucking our small supply of grub and accessories underneath. My companion strode off hurriedly to seek shelter in the Indian village while I directed my steps just as hurriedly to the squares of yellow comforting light.

As I knocked and entered, I was met in the bright light of the living room by Mr. and Mrs. McKay, cordially but without surprise.

That is a thing which always astonishes me; for though you may come from several thousands of miles away, though it may have been years since you have been greeted, though you come announced by letter, or unannounced and dripping wet, with two months' growth of long shaggy hair and an apology of an Old Testament beard, nevertheless, no one in that country where surprises are so few, ever seems to be in the least upset, and their greeting has all the common sense restraint as if they had already said "hello" the day before.

Supper was already in its delightful savour of preparation as I settled down in Robert McKay's big easy chair and toasted my wet feet before the warm stove. All the good things of life seemed to descend softly about me in a warm comfortable blanket of delicious smells and security.

Mrs. McKay scurried about the kitchen with the renewed and happy ardor which an unexpected guest arouses, while Robert McKay drew up a chair next to mine and discussed the news of the country.

Yes, he had had a normal year. Fur was still not up to the prices of two years before. The lynx seemed to be scarcer than usual, but there were still a goodly number of foxes. Had I seen any fox sign north, and were there many Indians going beyond the big lake when I had come down? Gracious, it had been three years since I had last been through. Did I know that the Fontaines had lost all their three boys through whooping cough, and the opposition trader had gone broke and pulled out? Did I think they would change the provincial law on the beaver this year? How was the new man making out at the post at Little Narrows? Oh, yes, they had a new youngster since I had been

through, named this one Robert at last. But what about the caribou this year?

It was just as we were about to sit down to supper that I was aware that the McKay's had another guest besides myself. I heard her coming downstairs after Mrs. McKay had cheerfully called that supper was ready.

"Meet Mrs. McKay's niece, Miss Stevens. She's from the states, too, been up here in the wilds with us for a month this summer."

She was a pretty girl, all vivacity, sparkling eyes, swift white hands, and full of chatter.

It was really a wonderful meal. I ate much too much fine, white bread, surreptitiously cramming down much more than, I knew quite well, was good for me, and tomatoes, fresh red tomatoes, and eventually cake, with frosting. We all talked gleefully and at odd random. The candles danced, the tomatoes gleamed red and fresh and delicious, the mound of white bread always reappeared on the dazzline white cloth. A wonderful meal.

After supper we settled comfortably in the living room after having whisked off the china and silver instruments of the feast and, with much laughter and banter, stowed them away in their cupboards. Miss Stevens flew to the radio and spun the dial expertly. The full resonant notes of a symphony filled the little room. We all sat silently as the deep-toned magic swept and swirled about us. Only the sparkling streaks on the window panes, appearing and disappearing like quicksilver in the brilliance of the kerosene lamps, betokened that a storm was raging outside.

With a great crescendo of sound the music finally ended. Miss Stevens turned the dial and the crashing applause died with the flicker of a little yellow light.

Then, sitting silently, we became conscious of the storm. The wind whined, and deep underneath it was the muffled roar of lashing spruces and the waves on the shore. The dogs of the village began to howl faintly and eerily above the wind. A shutter banged and the rain sizzled against the window panes with impotent fury.

We sat silently like this for a long time, each of us listening to the storm with as rapt attention perhaps as we had listened to the music. Then Miss Stevens turned to me. She had wonderfully sparkling eyes. Her voice was low and a little husky.

"I love it, love it, love it here. Don't you? Away from everything small, everything mean. It's clean, fresh, green here. Listen to that wind. You never hear the symphony of the wind in the city. And the Indian dogs singing to the moon at night. I could lie awake forever listening to them; they seem so far away and sad. And the Indians when they talk, so musical and rich, and the little brown youngsters always smiling with white teeth and black eyes. Oh, I don't ever want to go back home. The whole thing is romance, life."

"I hope you pulled your canoe up far enough. This is a real storm tonight, and there will be a good sea running on the lake by morning," said Bob McKay.

I nodded my head. "I'll stay down here and sleep. I've got my bed roll with me and anyway I've got to write up my notes," I answered.

Bob got a lamp from the kitchen and went upstairs to light the way for Miss Stevens. Mrs. McKay said that she was going to stay down a few minutes to get the breakfast things ready for the children. I turned to my notebooks, moved over a lamp and soon the storm and the faint and busy noises from the kitchen dropped from my mind.

I do not know just how long I had been writing when I was aware that Mrs. McKay was standing looking out into the blackness through the silver-streaked window. I looked at her curiously. It was black as pitch outside. The wind was fiendish in its fury. Even the wailing of the dogs came in scattered intervals as the wind swept over the house to join the roaring of the waves.

Mrs. McKay's voice suddenly broke upon me with a strange intensity that startled me. She was still looking out into the night.

"She loves it! It's romantic! It's free! Ten years of it. Ten years! Everyone I know, back in the Old Country. A letter, a few magazines at Christmas time. Where can I go? What freedom do I have? Whom do I talk to? Indian women, fat and dirty when I have a child. Lights and people and laughter. Has she ever listened to the wind when her husband is somewhere, God knows, maybe out there on the lake and never knowing when he is coming back or if he is ever coming back? Has she lain awake all night with a sick child and heard those dogs, howl, howl, howl? Has she ever seen her smiling Indian babies choking with pneumonia with no one who can do anything? Has she ever had to wait for weeks, for months to hear from home? When little Robert came, nothing, nothing but the dogs and the wind."

She turned away from the window and I bent to my notebooks writing furiously. She took the spare lamp from the table quietly, and crossed the room. She paused at the door and turned toward me, and with a smile that I have many times remembered said, with a small gesture that indicated all that was outside the window pane,

"I wonder if *you* know what that means out there?"

JOHN TANNER

Published in the Fall 1958 edition of Naturalist *magazine, P. G. Downes' "John Tanner, Captive of the Wilderness" is the best summary of his projected and largely researched book on the same subject. We are grateful to the Natural History Society of Minnesota for permission to reprint this article in its entirety.*

Those who travel the wilderness sometimes learn two things: first, that there is no time; second, that a man is only that which he alone *is* and not what either he or society may claim him to be. So the fact that one of the most extraordinary men of the border country disappeared one hundred and twelve years ago is less than incidental; that he was a man in the truest sense and in the most rigorous test of the wilderness is important.

This was John Tanner, Shaw-shaw-wa Ben-na-se, The Falcon, of the Rattlesnake Totem.

In May of 1789, the Reverend John Tanner, "much of a preacher, but not a man of the most peaceable cast," was planting corn at his new "station" some twenty-three miles southwest of Cincinnati. He had come over the mountains in 1781 leaving behind him a record of violence and persecution in Virginia and North Carolina all in the cause of his articulate Baptist convictions. At this instant, his nine year old son, also named John, had just stolen forth from the cabin to collect hickory nuts at the edge of the clearing. John Tanner never saw his son again.

Twenty-nine years later, the little boy, John Tanner, returned to the hickory tree but as a man, as an Indian in dress, in speech, in mind, in heart, in

soul. In those intervening years he had become a renowned hunter of game and men and he was now, though unwittingly, the living embodiment of two utterly antagonistic cultures and ways of life; the free, roving, hunting Indian, and the sedentary, but ever land-devouring, agrarian white. Twenty-eight years later, July 4, 1846, he disappeared again – this time forever.

John Tanner was stolen by two Ojibwa Indians from Saginaw (Michigan), Manito-O-geezhik (Spirit–Day?) and his son Kish-kau-ko to replace the dead son of the elder captor's wife. The little boy spent two bitter, brutal years with this family, until he was traded for some ten gallons of whisky and sundry trifles to an old yet distinguished Ottawa Indian woman named Net-no-kwa ("First," "Premier"?) to whom he became a devoted son until her death sometime about 1815. It would be presumptuous to sketch but the barest outline of the remarkable and tragic life which followed, for, in part at least, it was told one hundred and thirty years ago by him who lived it. Suffice it to note that after two years spent near Traverse Bay, Michigan, Net-no-kwa determined to remove to the rich beaver country, the turbulent frontier of the Assiniboine and and Red River valleys of now Manitoba, North Dakota, and Minnesota.

John Tanner's first winter in the border country was that of a thirteen year old boy who with his "brother" Wa-me-gon-a-biew (He-who-puts-on-feathers), became the sole support of his adoptive mother at Moose Lake, Minnesota, just west of old Grand Portage. An interim stay at Brule River, some miles to the southwest of this great fur-trade entrepot, a spring hunt on Isle Royale, and the indomitable Net-no-kwa, having lost her husband and eldest son that previous fall, set forth with her children for Red River.

Now at the age of fourteen, some distance above

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, the little white boy killed his first bear and then his first buffalo. From that moment he was a hunter, a man.

Let us turn back the pages of time for a glimpse of him, a few years later, by a young Vermont-born furtrader, Daniel Harmon, making entry in his diary at Fort Alexandria on the upper Assiniboine in today's eastern Saskatchewan:

"Thursday, July 9 (1801) – This day there came here an American, that, when a small child, was taken from his parents, who then resided in the Illinois country. He was kidnapped by the Sauteux, with whom he has resided ever since; and he speaks no other language excepting theirs. He is now about twenty years of age and is regarded as a chief among that tribe. He dislikes to hear people speak to him respecting his white relations; and in every respect excepting his colour, he resembles the savages, with whom he resides. He is said to be an excellent hunter. He remains with an old woman who, soon after he was taken from his relations, adopted him into her family; and they appear to be mutually fond of each other as if they were actually mother and son."

Those were the halcyon years of the hunter; the limitless buffalo, elk, antelope, the grizzly bear of the prairies, the moose and "bush" caribou of the "thickwoods." Thus, the beautiful open valley of the Assiniboine, the parklands and forest of the Riding Mountain, the rolling prairie of the upper Pembina and the flat, verdant floor of the Red River valley became his hunting grounds. To the south, only the horizon bounded the haunts of the wariest game of all, men, the Sioux. But the apparently inexhaustible bounty of nature a century and a half ago could no better stand the onslaught of the most voracious of all predators, man, than it can today. The explosive incursion of the

Ojibway, or Chippewa, from the woodlands of the border country, the Ottawa from the Great Lakes, the Nipissing from eastern Ontario and the Iroquois from Quebec; above all, the insatiable demands of the fiercely competing fur-trade companies – the even-then ancient Hudson's Bay Company, the aggressive North West and the ambitious XY were too much for a land previously but sporadically visited by the Assiniboine and the Cree.

The pockets of plenty shifted and with them the roving Indian bands. John Tanner, now the provider for his own family increasingly came back to the forest, to Lake of the Woods, where Garden Island, or as he calls it, "Me-nau-zhe-taw-naung," became his base. Here a primitive cornpatch, the wild rice of the fall, and that core of the border people's strength and delight, maple-sugar, combined with seasonal excursions via the "Indian road," Reed River, the Great Swamp portage and Roseau River to the Red River, Alexander Henry's trading post there, and the buffalo beyond.

So John Tanner lived the full cycle of man in nature. It composed all those elements which are of men wherever they may be: feast and famine, triumphs and defeats, joys and fears, marriage, birth, death, health and disease, fortune and accident, and, maybe most important of all (particularly vivid in the wilderness and to the wilderness man), the interior life of dreams; dreams so real that, as every hunting Indian knows, they are you and yet something greater than you, your strength and yet the strength to which you turn when all else fails. This is the dream-spirit, the "pu-a-gan."

But, like all men, wherever they may be and of whatever time, John Tanner, the wondrously sufficient

hunter, was a victim of greater forces. With the establishment of that incredible reality of a Scot's utopianism, the Red River Settlement, Lord Selkirk's Colony (now modern Winnipeg), that introduction of the agricultural sedentary white man, the world of the hunter was inexorably doomed.

Maybe it was this that stirred the latent fires of his strict, Baptist infancy. In the struggle for mastery of the northwest, a grapple for survival by the two fur-trade empires, the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay Companies, with the reality of Selkirk's dreams, the catalyst, John Tanner, convinced of the moral right of the latter, played a brief yet not insignificant part. There were other reasons why, in 1818, he decided to go back to the hickory tree in Kentucky, to become what he could not totally deny – a white man. Not the least was the growing within him of the gulf between the cultural rationalism of the white man and the age-old irrationalism of his Indian relatives. Deeper and half-submerged antagonisms than these were there, but, in any event, he left the Lake of the Woods in 1818, alone, unable to speak a word of English.

As he travelled through the border country, he felt the first hatreds of the whites in some of the very furtraders whom he had so bountifully and faithfully supplied, the Nor'Westers to whom he was now a symbol of the hated Selkirk. He went all the way back: Rainy Lake, Fort William, the Sault, Detroit, to Governor Cass' great treaty at St. Mary's and to Ohio, where at length his nephew, Merritt, found him; then back over the same route of twenty-nine years before. At last he found his elder brother, Edward, though he could not speak to him.

A year later he returned to the border country, to Garden Island. Again he left but this time with three of his children and his second Ojibway wife. Leaving the latter, with a child born enroute, at Mackinac, he

took the other children to Edward's home near New Madrid, Missouri, where his father had died during the "Big Shake" of 1812. However, the malarial fevers of the lower Mississippi, which perhaps he felt, Indian-wise, as hatreds, drove him back after the death of his eldest daughter, Mary. Leaving the children at Mackinac, he returned to the border country as an engage to John Jacob Astor's bustling American Fur Company. He hated this role for it forced upon him the standard practice of the trade, the use of liquor whose monstrous and murderous effect he had witnessed for so many years. Once more he returned to Red River to bring out two more of his children, daughters of an earlier marriage.

In late July of 1823, coming back over the well-known route, Rainy Lake to Fort William, he was cordelling his canoe at the rapids below Island Portage on the Maligne River. A confederate of his wife, one Ome-zhuh-gwut-oons whom he had befriended, fired at him from the island. A ball with a thong attached smashed through his right arm, passed into his chest and flattened itself against his breast bone. He managed to pull himself upon the rocks which divide the rapid. Half-naked, bleeding, the green-headed flies already feasting, he screamed his defiance. He raised his "sas-sah-kwi," his cry of exultation and vengeance. There was no answer. There he was found by two very proper fur traders on their way to Rainy Lake, Messrs. Grant and Alexander Stewart, and taken back to the Rainy Lake post of Dr. John McLaughlin. The physician saved his life and he finally left for Sault Ste. Marie to become a U. S. government interpreter.

To relate in detail the remainder is not for these pages. In fragment it is a bitter story and much yet remains to be found. John Tanner was of the wilderness, and the white world which he chose for his children could not accept him nor could he grovel before it. He was a man.

In 1830, Dr. Edwin James, the army surgeon at Fort Brady, Sault Ste. Marie published his life from his dictation. Tanner received fifty dollars from it. It was bitter fruit and he averred he would have given ten thousand dollars had it never been written, for to the white world it confirmed him as a crazy half-Indian and a liar. He never knew that he had given to generations to come the most intimate, the truest picture of the heart of the northern, hunting Indian that time could ever after provide.

On the night of July 4, 1846, a little white house at Sault Ste. Marie burned to the ground. As everyone knew, and no one cared, it was the house of Tanner, the "White Indian", "Crazy" Tanner, the town bogeyman for the past eighteen years. Two days later James L. Schoolcraft, the handsome brother of the former Indian agent, Henry R., was found murdered. To the local Baptist preacher, to the credulous populace, the coincidence was plain. John Tanner was never seen again.

Many years later one recalled how the embittered old man with the long white hair and the piercing blue eyes used to sit there by the little white house gazing westward into the sunset. What were his thoughts? Were they of his son, James, who even then was going back to the border country to become the first Baptist missionary in his old hunting country west of Pembina? Was it of his first, and to us unnamed, son still hunting buffalo and Sioux? Maybe he thought of his friend Esh-ke-buk-ke-kou-sa, Flat Mouth, the most extraordinary Ojibway of them all, the Leech Lake chief who out-maneuvered the Sioux twenty-five times, who had hood-winked Captain Zebulon M. Pike, and who, when introduced to the President, in Washington, was to comment, "Now, two great men have met." Maybe he thought of A-ke-wah-zains, who, when introduced to Queen Victoria, could not bring himself to give her

his peace pipe because, after all, she was a woman. There were so many friends dead or now dying; the last, free hunters of the lakes, the forests and prairies – Wesh-ko-bug, the Sweet, Broken Tooth, Peguis, Many Eagles (le Sonant) whose magnificent portrait was painted for the Prince of Wied. Maybe he thought of the time he killed twenty moose and elk, using the same seven balls over and over again.

Maybe he thought of the white men: Alexander Henry the younger, J. W. Dease, whom he called "Mr. Tace," or the unpleasant Archibald McLellan, whom he knew as "Mr. Harshfield," or John Wills, the builder of Fort Gibraltar, whom he knew as "The Sail" because he was so fat. Then there were the white men who had befriended him now so long ago: Lord Selkirk, Dr. John McLaughlin who had nurtured him after the shooting at what they now called "Tanner's Rapids," Major Joseph Dalafield of the American Boundary Commission, Mr. Keating of Major Long's expedition, Governor Cass, Governor Clark, "the "Red Head", as they called him, so many, so many, so long ago.

But you who have traveled the border lakes of "les Pay d'en Haut," know what you think about when the trip is over and the struggle done. It is not the pain, the danger, the fears, the hardship; nor is it very much the people.

I think John Tanner, Shaw-shaw-wa Ben-na-se, The Falcon, of the Rattlesnake totem, sat there remembering as we all do: the big lakes with a fair wind, the nights when the cheepaiak, the spirits dance, the dawn of the good dream, the day of the dry camp, and... just one more lake to traverse, one more rapid to run.

TERM EXAMINATIONS

No compendium of Mr. Downes' prose writing could be complete without a few excerpts from some of his more notorious term examinations at Belmont Hill. Among the many intricate testing patterns that he evolved, the following, we think, are some of the best.

PHYSIOGRAPHY V FINAL EXAMINATION

Act I, Scene I: The stage is set representing a long rectangular school room typical of the post-Pleistocene type. It is crowded with the young of the species "homo sapiens" though a few hardly resemble the latter adjective. All are in various states of anticipation, worry and distress with a few vaguely looking out at the ionosphere. As a squat, bespectacled creature hands out sheets of paper the calm of approaching death settles over the group and far off the faint, resonant clang of the bell of doom can be heard amidst the rising sound-waves of gnawed fingernails.

First Student: Now what do I do with this? (He begins to fashion the paper into an airplane.)

First spirit: No, no, you do that afterward. Remember this is like the midyear...

Second spirit: Hear, hear, like the mid-year, no fear, mid-year, free beer...

First spirit: Quiet! You 3.2 spirit! Remember, do the MINIMUM at least. Then be sure and read each question all the way through before answering...

Second spirit: Even if I have to turn the page?

First spirit: Yes, even if you have to turn the page. Use all the information you have. Remember places MEAN something.

Second spirit: You're right there, bub.

First spirit: Use physiographic terminology.

Second spirit: You mean it was his fault when he didn't say sea?

First spirit: And use diagrams where you can but make them accurately and make them mean something.

Exeunt spirits with Spirit the second flapping his spectral ears in time to the renewed tolling of the bell of doom. The clock indicates two hours fifty-seven minutes of uninterrupted agony.

Act I, Scene II: The stage set is the same but there is a subtle difference. The shattered desks are covered with human forms. Here and there a tattered shirt and in some cases a necktie clings to a pale body. In one corner, (upstage left), flies are already gathering about a body. The hands of the clock point to three hours passed. The bespectacled figure, now dressed in the costume of Attila slowly moves through the aisles twitching his long pointed tail nervously. In the wings a Greek choir can be heard chanting faintly the vowels in order, curiously emphasizing the second one. Over all is an immense husk of weariness and the door has already been opened (left rear) to allow an ever-increasing meandering stream of perspiration to flow outward. The bespectacled figure gathers in all the papers, walks to a desk (center forward) and takes out a large red pencil which grows in size as he touches it to the first book. There is a terrific explosion and the entire stage and cast disappears leaving nothing but the Densmore children playing in a small pile of ashes.

(Curtain)

IV. You and your eleven children are spending the summer camping on Manitoulin Island in Lake Huron. Your eldest son fell off the vertical northern face of the island, thirty feet, into the lake where he perished, but the other ten happily went their way rolling their little red wagons down the gently sloping southward surface, the flashing teeny red wheels occasionally catching in the brambles, bumping into the scattered granite rocks and boulders, or catching in curious parallel grooves. With paternal pride you watch Gregorovich, the youngest, as he fills his little tummy with fragments of the bedrock which he digs up with his prehensile eight fingers. You know, of course, that his stomach acids will quickly dissolve the limestone and it's just pennies in your pocket not to feed the little monster. Sometimes you gaze away to the north where the grey, south-facing cliffs of the Canadian mainland present an undulating, rolling, remarkably subdued, and even skyline. From your daughter "Tanty," (nee Tarantula) who swims the 12 mile stretch of water every day bringing you back rock samples snuggled 'neath her water wings, you know that there the rock is crystalline with here and there dark, dense vertical and branching bands. She tells you of hatching out a clutch of snapping-turtle eggs in a soft, sand terrace forty feet above the water. Suddenly you have a brilliant flash of sanity. After sixty years it all comes back. Phys.V.! And now you can explain the land-forms, the origin of the granite boulders, the grooves, the turtle's nest, your own island, the Canadian side, everything – so do.

PROBLEM VII. (MINIMUM) Myrtle and Fyrtle had at last completed their arduous climb. Myrtle sat down with a sigh of contentment upon a nearby mountain thistle and contemplated with rapt attention the vast and splendid panorama about them. Fyrtle, his heart

pounding from emotion and his last cup of Sanka and last puff of No-nics, drew nearer, grasped her hand, and began boldly to admire with ardent desire the intricate pattern of purple freckles on her left index finger. He gazed into her eyes; he loved these eyes, both the red and the green one, but in their marvellous austerity he found one focused on the distant towering Pike's Peak to the south, and the equally distant even crests of the Park Range to the west. In the breathless silence of the immense world, Myrtle began to speak. Fyrtle loved the sound of that rich bass voice. It always brought back nostalgic memories of the good old B&M milk special going through the Hoosac Tunnel:

"You know Fyrtle, the only good thing I know about you is that you took Physiography V thirty years ago." She paused and stretched out her other hand, the one with two fingers, "Tell me, here we are at the summit, 9,000 feet above my little old shanty in the Jersey meadows, and yet everywhere I see these magnificent mountains, row upon row and now when we are here they all seem to be about the same height as we! How do you account for it, how did it all come about?"

Fyrtle thought for a long moment and cleared his throat allowing three blue-bottle flies to escape which he had been saving just in case:

"Well, Myrtle its like this, long, long ago....."

CARRY ON!

PART IV: Once upon a time, there were three de-Stalinized, Titoist pixies who lived in a cavern in the Karst region of Yugoslavia. They made a fine living

selling filthy stalactites to visiting American tourists. However, they finally felt that they should have nobler objectives in life and that they should benefit their own people who are hungry. Therefore, one of them decided to use his earnings to build a big dam, on the lay-away plan, which would raise the water level and provide for irrigation. The other decided to hire professional rain-makers in airplanes. The third one said, "To heck with 5-year plans", and moved to Carlsbad Cavern and started in private business all over again. What happened to the former home and business of the other two and why?

HISTORY VI MID-YEAR EXAMINATION
JANUARY 1950

Facts about this examination:
As you sit contemplating this examination you are the first and last students in world history who have reached this exact chronological period in time half way through the twentieth century. You have studied the last fifty years of your country's history, fifty of the most astonishing years in all time. What is the fruit of that study? For some two and one half hours you are given the opportunity to immortalize this occasion. After pondering and reflection, after preparing a guiding outline on the left hand page, write a resume:

United States, 1900-1950

SIDELIGHTS

After his return to Belmont Hill in 1946, Mr. Downes became a steady contributor to the Alumni Bulletin *for a period of two or three years. We have selected three articles in particular, all of which have appeared earlier in the Bulletin. The first, "Outside Reading, 1947" was occasioned by Mr. Downes' observations upon his return from war and self-exile. The second turns its attention to the newly revised (1947-48) History VI course, aspects of which many alumni will recognize. The third (1949) leaves P. G. Downes simply free to recall "Some Sidelights – Very Dim – On History."*

OUTSIDE READING 1947

"One of the strangest of all American fauna is the magister scholasticis privatis. This peculiar biped occupying the lower branches of the economic jungle, whence he exacts a minimum sustenance, returns again and again to his haunts whither drawn by instinct, desire or just perversity it is hard to judge."

(From the Monotonous Monologues of Roger Rolliflex, Vol. 1, Verse 1.)

Mr. Keller, with that subtle, diabolical mixture of good humor and menace which still has unchallenged effectiveness in getting things done, has charged me

to write a dissertation on my return, persuasively qualifying that it be shot through with light and airy touches of humor. Nothing could be more difficult nor hideous to me. The very tragedy of going to work anywhere, even under the optimum of conditions, is a sufficiently poignant one to plunge me into a state of Scroogian testiness. You will have to be content with a few moribund reflections of a grateful returnee.

First, in true teacher tradition, I must pass on to you at least one nugget of empiric truth. A few months ago a writer of considerable national reputation went to some length in his latest book to develop the thesis of the essential necessity and desirability of eating meat in preference to and defence against what he envisages as practically a plot to clog the collective colon of mankind with every variety of non-meat substitute. As a living example of the validity of his thesis, quite unknown to me, he used my own experiences of some summers past as evidence, (extraordinary the potential of weird publicity the school harbors in each of its members). I must now publicly confess that I have let the theory down on the basis of porcupines. In the inter-bellum interval between World War II and my return to school I had once more, (but on an isolated mountain in Vermont), attempted to stretch the limit of the adaptability to environment of the private school teacher. A total of twelve porcupines over a period of months, fried, broiled, sauteed and fricasseed, each delicately emitting that fine old bouquet that aged wall-paper lends, eventually resulted in my retreat to Boston with scurvy, (an affliction I had assumed disappeared with the square-rigger).

There are pages of eulogies I might write. Let me save these for my ""*A la Recherche des Temps*

Perdus" when time and the exasperation of employers force me back to my rocking chair and my aged myopic eyes need use a telescope sight against intruders.

To me the real thing, the real value in these happily recaptured surroundings which have so much in retrospect for you and so much in hope to both of us, is that in this very swiftly shifting and immediately confusing contemporary microcosm of political, ethical, economic and social change, a very definite theory directed toward a rational, humanistic goal with some semblance of stability, with conscious and very competent direction, is in existence here; that unlike the so frequent case of the American private school here not yet is exhibited the senescence of tradition-constipation nor denial either of tradition's creative aspects.

I have always disliked the label "alumni." It provokes a conception of finality and to a degree divorcement. God forbid that you should be perennial students, a mutually horrid fate; but as friends, accomplices and personal victims of these many years, it is in the irresistible cycles of time that the intervals between seeing you have lengthened from class periods to months and years. In these so relative interims may you acquire even greater wisdom to pass back to us who, laboring in the vineyard, find to our considerable astonishment we have nurtured infinitely more successful and illustrious produce than either ourselves or our unpublished private predictions.

SOME COMMENTS ON SIXTH FORM HISTORY 1947-1948

"History, my dear Rollo, is not the act of your sitting in that chair, but what you are thinking or your lack of it which may some day very well result in there being no chairs to sit in."
—("The Outline of Misery"—by Tattle Turnkee—p.99.)

Once again I find Finch, the Admirable Extractor, drawing forth from me an article for the Alumni Bulletin; subject: History. As there appears to be some curiosity on the matter of what we are currently attempting in Sixth Form History, a curiosity which has spread beyond baffled parents, benumbed students to alumni, it is my duty as perpertrator to throw a little light into a darkness which is even pretty opaque around here sometimes. Briefly, in background: in a survey of the whole problem of American History last year, it was apparent to all of us that the subject by the pure accumulation of chronological events has become too massive to encompass in one year if any sort of moderately mature text or teaching is to be employed. Secondly, it was equally obvious that we were providing no adequate understanding or discussion of the post-war scene; a very serious deficit in our teaching program. Most educational institutions of either secondary or college level have had for some time now an awareness of the latter problem, granted that this awareness is in many cases pretty dim. In consequence, within the last two years, the educational body has broken forth in a rash of courses: "Contemporary Society," "World Events," "America and Her Place in World Affairs," etc. etc, etc. *ad*

nauseum. On the secondary level probably one of the most successful of these is that conducted at St. Paul's. On February of last year consultations were held with representatives of the St. Paul's and Nobles history departments. Thus we were able to examine and analyze to some degree active working programs. This led to a long and pleasant series of examinations of the various angles of the problem here and, after about a case and a half of beer, we felt that to set up along obvious lines a purely "current events" course for our Sixth Form was not the most intelligent or potentially productive possibility. As has been indicated again and again, it does little good to talk about or attempt to teach matters for which an orderly cause-and-effect background is not previously present. These types of courses may be successful at college level where those marvelously sharp minds, honed to a razor edge of analytical keeness by the editorials of the *Daily Record,* can distinguish between the Potsdam Agreement and a contract in an obscure class EE baseball league; but their tendency is to become mere reinterpretations of the interpretations of interpretors who in many cases might better have confined their analyses to professional wrestling.

To solve both problems, we have devised a course taken by all Sixth Formers which stems directly out of the Fifth Form American History course and is occasionally called by its victims in more polite moments "Contemporary Society." We start the year with the close of the Spanish-American War, use Morison and Commager, a text some of you are familiar with in college, and progress in a more or less, (the Sixth Form believe less), conventional manner. Once a week we tackle the world and domestic scene via such as *Time;* a sort of forced acquaintanceship. On the side we have lined up some

seventy-five topics of domestic or foreign importance ranging anywhere from the depletion of the Mesabi Iron Range and its consequence to, let us say, the problem of Indonesia. Each student is assigned a separate topic upon which he labors in private suffering and anguish and for which he works out his own source of material. Once a week both sections of the course meet as a body and engage in debate, panel discussion or listen to a speaker either internal or external. In this latter function you alumni could be of great aid and inspiration. I feel very strongly that the establishment of a strong precedent of alumni participation in the intellectual growth of the school is most desirable. Bob Campbell, for instance, came down from Worcester and gave the class a splendid talk. These talks are not listened to, merely, but notes are taken and they are imbedded within the required total information. Surely there are many more alumni capable and willing to talk on subjects bearing upon our contemporary scene and I urge you to communicate with me on the matter.

By mid-years, we expect to have finished our chronological history to within the present hour. From this point on it appears more desirable to turn much of our attention to some of the great principles which are active today or have been very recently, and which are or have been the yeast within our evolving world-society than to spend the whole time on catching on to fast-fleeing coat-tails of the news; always an amateur performance.

In our dual attention to both principles and events, it seems that one of the most thought-provoking methods is directed reading of contrasting public opinion. To this end we use the *New York Times, PM* and the *Chicago Tribune*. The parallel representation

of the march of mankind by these three oracles is both wonderful and bizarre. At the same time the *Atlantic, Harper's,* the *Nation, US News* and varioùs other periodicals come in for attention while our outside reading finds us consulting Lippmann, Davis and Lindley, F. L. Allen and other savants and racconteurs.

And now let me come to what we have conceived as the hard core of the course: the effort to cause, to force, to encourage critical intelligent thinking within the framework of a subject which has fallen woefully into tradition-hardened, rote-memory and unquestioning obedience to the demogogues of marks, text, and college boards. Almost daily there appears on the blackboard a quotation. This may have been selected from any source (and in exams optionally in any of five languages) from Laotze through Marx to Taft. This quote is analyzed and given approval or disapproval on the basis of whatever historical-precedent facts the victim can muster (and, *mirabile dictu* in this mechanical age of yes and no, true and false, written out in long hand!). This is a painful operation but it does require the ability to understand the written word in syllable groupings of more than two; it does force an appreciation of man's wisdom or folly regardless of race, culture or time, and it does force one to use history as an implement in critical thinking and understanding.

It ought to be quite clear now why one's earplugs against anguished howls and screams, (with delicacy I omit the sources), have to be particularly snug-fitting. At the same time this article may have a little reverse English; for, unlike the usual blowing on the embers of happy days, it may afford you the pleasure of seeing what you, in your purely fortunate

happenstance of birth, have escaped. In any event, it is a needed attempt to crawl along the increasingly obscure path of truth, though the deceptive character of the contemporary jungle makes it sometimes a faltering progress. So far, even with my unusual topographic proximity to Heaven on my Vermont mountain top, I have received no Divine light; perhaps some of you will contribute a few pinchhits of more earthly wisdom.

SOME SIDELIGHTS – VERY DIM – ON HISTORY

Once again I find that svelte but formidable form of the Grand Inquisitor at my threadbare elbow with the unspoken threat of excommunication from future Alumni dinners if I don't produce some filler for your Alumni Bulletin. Searching about in some desperation and, as a synthetic historian, it occurs to me that one might knock off a gentle, non-instructive, little memoire within the furthest orbit of my present field, history. As you are all aware, history has a certain pleasure-pain characteristic of retreating in chronological and rapid order into documents and text books which employ hundreds of graduate students which would otherwise join the outer marginal livers of our society. In my travels, particularly in the arctic and sub-arctic where my friends are not afflicted by the artificialities of scholarly research, I have come upon some piquant and intriguing foreshortenings of history which have repeatedly delighted me. In a land where there is no time there can be no history in our rather dull, time-clock conception of it.

For instance, some years ago I had a long conversation with my spiritual grandfather, a particularly

weathered and well-smoked Cree Indian of an indeterminant age. In our conversations he mentioned some other white men who had come by the spot where we were sitting. They were most remarkable, particularly as one of them wore a silk hat and the other blew up a large bag on a stick from whence came the most horrible noises. For a long time I wondered about this, as from his vivid description of the gentleman and his vagueness as to date, it appeared that this was some few hundred years before. It was only until a few years later, and by reading into the early annals of the fur trade in British North America, that I realized his "other white men" was without the slightest question the famous trip by Sir George Simpson and his servant and piper Colin Fraser in the year 1827. In a somewhat similar vein, I have repeatedly followed long obscure routes in which I had to rely upon the descriptions of voyageurs and travelers now long since dead a century or more, and, as I referred to their accounts in the field itself, one would be repeatedly overcome with descriptions of landmarks and events, in which as you sat there, there was not the slightest appreciable change down to the moment; it was as fresh as if written and observed yesterday.

Fifty years ago a very famous trip was made into the region east of Great Slave Lake in northern Canada. The author of the trip (and subsequent account, now solid history) spent a great deal of time in condemnation of a particular guide and native companion he had of whom he was particularly critical on the basis of the latter's lack of truthfulness. So this man was condemned for all time and for the historical record. Thirty-nine years later I was camped on the banks of the Slave River and a tattered old Dog-Rib Indian walked by whom I invited to tea. In the somewhat difficult process of our conversation I asked him his name. When he told me I almost jumped from the ground, for incredibly it was the guide of

this famous explorer. "Tell me", I said, "what did you think of the great --------?" "The worst g-- d-- liar I ever knew," replied my feeble yet indomitable guest.

Of course it is now no longer ethical to name rivers, lakes, promontories and such geographical features either for oneself or their institutions or backers; that went out when the then assumed site of the magnetic pole was named after the Tom Booth Gin Co. (Ltd.) Granted rather reactionary souls like the British Admiralty are faced with a hard decision when forced to choose between naming perfectly obvious hills in Hudson Straits either the native name "Maiden's Paps" or after a first lord of the Admiralty, but still the preferred practice is to adopt the native name. It has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life to rescue from permanent obscurity some of the native names of an almost extinct people, my friends the Idthen-eldeli (Caribou Eaters to you) and fix for all time such names as "Kasmere's River," "A-Man-named-Caribou-Hoof-died-here Lake," "Two-anus inlet" and many more charming and real names that they may be preserved for all time, where, on the present aerial maps of the far north, they have been now imprinted.

Some years ago I visited Boothia Peninsula in the high arctic and arrived at a spot not previously visited since the year 1858, and then by the McClintock Expedition which was one of the last in search of both the Northwest Passage and the mysterious and illfated Franklin Expedition. In rambling about we found a copper cannister filled with manuscript, this was coming upon history at its research best. I can remember feverishly climbing Mt. Walker (I found it 108 feet lower than M'Clintock) and finding on top of it a stone cairn partially broken down. When my last

predecessor had been on that spot and gazed so longingly there at the very tip of the North American continent to the western frozen sea no doubt he had left a record; in this case it was gone but pursuant of tradition I left my own aluminum film capsule with my affiliation with this school for the historians and archaeologists of the century of the future to marvel and ponder over.

The incredibly supple arm of historical coincidence too is a not infrequent and delightful surprise. In the northern trip, in which after some one hundred and sixty-seven years I was to validate the geographic claims of a famous very early northern traveler, I learned from a very old man that another white man had passed that way, also an American with a strange name. The most diligent search did not reveal who this mysterious and completely shadowy character could be. But then in the Harvard Coop one day I happened to read the dedication of a current book, was struck by the dedication and the name, wrote the author, found out that the dedicee was my mysterious and silent predecessor, and the author's wife had many years ago taught piano lessons at Belmont Hill School!

Sometimes, of course, the historian is put to gently disillusioning his contemporaries—this goes on almost every day in class here—but once in a while it may take an even more primitive form, as when, during the war, the brightest of economic-intelligence-analysts were thrilled to discover a monster underground aircraft plan north of Mukden in Manchuria and one was forced to point out that all the bombs in the world would merely rattle the dusty bones in the tomb of the last of the great Mongols.

Possibly one of the oddest experiences for the chronologically infested historian is to discover that he himself (still idiotically convinced he is in his youth rather than in the senility of his life), has become a historical figure and indeed so dim as to be a legend. In 1947 I went back to the North and walked into a bush-flyer's office asking for some photos I thought they might have of a certain lake. His efficient and youthful secretary was most obliging. As I was about to leave she said, "You know, years ago there was a fellow who went to that lake. He is probably dead now but he wrote a book about it and at least you can get a lot of information about this spot from it." "Is that so?" I mildly queried, "What did you think about it or more particularly him?" "Mad, completely cuckoo if you ask me," she replied. "I agree one hundred per cent," I replied, and then as I closed the door on the modern age, murmured, "I know him so well."

EPILOGUE

In 1951 P. G. Downes composed an "Epilogue" to his first long published prose work, Sleeping Island *(New York, 1943). We are delighted to offer it to those who may have read* Sleeping Island, *and especially to those who would care to make it a permanent part of their personal copy.*

What happened afterward? Of the people of *Sleeping Island,* a number of curious things have since transpired.

However, of the most important person in the trip, John (Albrecht), nothing has been seen of him from the time he successfully returned to the trading post at Reindeer Lake, Brochet, and set out presumably for his trapping grounds around Wollaston Lake. He has apparently vanished. There is a reason for this which was not included in the book. One may recall that John was a German national. Like many others in Canada, particularly in the far north, he had never taken out formal papers of any kind. One day we talked about the possibility of another war and John said, rather simply, that after all these years of freedom he would never again spend a day behind barbed wire. When he got back to Brochet, he was informed that Canada was at war with Germany. He made no comment but packed his outfit, took our faithful canoe which I had arranged for him to have and that is the last record we have of him. If he had perished, it seems impossible that the Indians would not have discovered it. Contrary to popular notion, men do not disappear, whatever the circumstances, in

the north. But John Albrecht did. I have often speculated about this and have wondered if sometime, somewhere, John may have read the book and what he may have thought of it. He was a fine companion.

Of the Brochet crowd, incredible as it may seem, old Father Egernolf is still alive and still there. Of the Indians, the powerful old "chief" Kasmere died in the winter of 1940. He was buried standing up as he had requested. Old Edzanni is dead. "Eskimo" Charlie, the white-trapper whose picture appears in the photographs, was found dead in his bunk in his incredible cave in 1947. He had been dead for several months. Lopizun appeared, to my surprise and delight, in a book some years back, *Manitoba Round-About* by the Canadian photographer Richard Harrington. He is called "Robertson" and was then hunting out of Duck Lake, Manitoba. I do not know what may have happened to Zah-bah-dese (Jean Baptiste). Many of that extreme northern band have died.

Much the most interesting has been the subsequent history of Charles Schweder, the boy with whom I travelled into the Barrens at Windy Lake. My last sight of Charlie had been the sad spectacle of his sitting there surrounded by his dogs, desolated by the news that he would be going outside. He and his father Fred did fly out eventually and go south to Winnipeg. But they returned the following summer with the other children. Fred had resigned from the Hudson's Bay Company and he and Charles with a younger brother Fred, Junior, built a new post at the mouth of Windy River at its discharge into Nueltin Lake. The old life was resumed but as the years went by, Fred went outside to Churchill and Winnipeg and acted as a sort of agent for the boys. Sometime after this, the two boys were joined by a third brother,

Mike, who was but ten years old. Then in 1945 or 1946 Charles adopted two Eskimo girls, Anoteelik and the smallest, Rita, was five years old. Their parents, members of the local Eskimo band, had starved to death.

In May 1947, the family of Charles was joined by a party flown in from Churchill. This was a scientific expedition financed by the Arctic Institute, which had selected this spot by reading *Sleeping Island*. It consisted of Dr. Francis Harper of Philadelphia and his hired assistant Farley Mowat, the latter a young Canadian whose imagination and lack of veracity are notable. They made the "new" Windy post their collecting base. The old post had been abandoned within a year or so of my leaving in 1939. By midsummer Harper and his assistant could no longer bear each other (to this day Harper, a distinguished zoologist, refuses to spell the name Mowat in any communication either scientific or personal) and Mowat was "fired". He then wandered about with Charles and Fred, Jr., and eventually abandoned Harper and left the country by air after cashing a sizeable check with the Hudson's Bay Company on the strength of the imposture that he was still employed by the Institute. Later Mowat wrote a book of his purported adventures called *People of the Deer* which is a remarkable blend of fact and fiction although presented by Atlantic, Little Brown as completely authentic. The book created a big stir due to some of its sensational charges as well as the vigorous promotion by the *Atlantic Monthly* and Little Brown. Needless to say there is no mention of Harper in the book nor any mention of *Sleeping Island* from which Mowat had extracted convenient paragraphs. Charles is the "Franz" of this book and Fred Jr. is "Hans". The Eskimoes become a new and, of course, "unknown"

tribe, the men in it are the same we saw there in 1939.

Aside from this distasteful business, Charles apparently never forgot the Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds* which I had left with him so many years before and when the Harper party arrived they had at their disposal a highly skilled naturalist. One has only to read the various monographs published by Harper to see the enormous contribution that Charles made and a contribution quite correctly credited to him by Harper. As far as I know this extraordinary "family" still hunts and traps there in the Barrens. Charles himself must be 32 now.

There is one very sad note about the book. One may recall the incident of our flying out and becoming lost in the plane and staying with Mary Fortin and her family. In 1947 some Americans at Churchill (we have an air base there) read Henry Fortin (the famous missing husband) the passage in the book concerning Mary's greeting to us when we drew up to her cabin. They convinced Henry that he had a good chance to collect some money from a no doubt "rich" American by threatening a libel suit. In due time I received a very menacing letter from him promising just such an action if I did not make some sort of "settlement". Needless to say this *cause internationale* never did come about nor did I make any settlement. Yet it has always distressed me that the book should have brought any wound to anyone in the North.

There are several other minor "addenda" but in essence this is "what happened next".