POLICING THE WILDERNESS

BY W. G. FITZ-GERALD

TAKE the public services of both Americas by and large, from Hudson Bay to Patagonia, and I doubt whether you will match the record of the famous Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. How a handful of three hundred law officers, adventurous, fearless, and luminously honest, keep entire order in an Arctic wilderness five times as large as Great Britain—here, surely, is a story worth telling.

And it makes reading quite as good as its promise. For here is a "precinct" covering 197,000 square miles of silent waste, icy yet golden, peopled mainly by Indians and Eskimos, with a few thousand whites, who are apt to think that no law goes so near as this to the North Pole. But the wildest of them knows different now. "Get the man"—the classic motto of the Northwest Mounted Police, is known and felt from the ocean to the innermost recesses of the wilderness.

A thousand miles on the ice, "mushing" by dog team and komatik, through unexplored haunts of bear and wolf, is a common marching order for these splendid pioneers. It does one good to read the record of their work. And much digging is required to get at the facts, for the "N. W. M. P." have a good, healthy scorn of boast and advertisement.

You will meet them first as you enter Canadian territory by the famous White Pass, where Old Glory floats side by side with the clustered crosses of the Dominion. Soon the four snorting engines come to a standstill, and a quiet, gentlemanly officer enters the car to examine baggage. You will find thereafter that you can no more escape your own shadow than one of these "Guardians of the North" wherever you go in this seemingly limitless Yukon Territory.

At Tagish, on the lonely Six Mile, you come upon a cluster of tumble-down log shanties. Push on further down the mighty Yukon and every twenty miles or so you can see the Union Jack floating from a log hut that shelters a police detachment. There was a time, and that not long ago, when these now desolate stations throbbed with life and energy, and the golden Yukon was a great highway of traffic. Then, as now, these officers were true Samaritans in the wilderness. Their willing hands uplifted wayfarers fainting on the road. The numbed and the sick and the dying were cared for; and at the same time strong, active feet were held in leash to track a miscreant to swift justice. It will never be known how many lives were saved, how many of the lawless held in check, by the officers in those feverish times.

To-day the Northwest Mounted Police have two great centers, one at Dawson, the other at Whitehorse. And, wonderful to say, just as telephone or telegraph operator feels the beat of a crowded city's pulse miles away, so does the commanding officer at these headquarters know everything that goes on even in the remotest region of his stupendous precinct.

For over a thousand miles the unobtrusive telegraph line runs beside the

mighty flood, and patrol systems on the various creeks and trails assist in preserving order. It is a fact that on the great road between Dawson and Whitehorse, more than three hundred and twenty miles, the traveler to-day is positively safer than if he were driving along a country road in eastern Canada or any settled part of Alaska.

No man starts down the great Yukon in a small boat without numbering and registering his craft, as well as his own name and business. There are justice and redress for every one, no matter how remote his location. Let a humble miner's *cache* be stolen, and forthwith a diligent search that may cover five hundred miles will be made for it, and after that summary vengeance will surely fall upon the thief. As I shall show, no expense is spared; and sometimes hundreds or even thousands of dollars will be spent in a case—only to find that the thieves were bears, after all!

Let serious accident befall a man in some lonely camp, and no city hospital could be more urgent and self-sacrificing in hurrying relief than these Mounted Police. Many a stirring tale might be told of how the sick and wounded, whites and Indians alike, have been brought into hospital over painful and dangerous trails, through icy mountain passes and menacing torrents.

Quite recently news came to headquarters at Whitehorse that a Russian Jew woodchopper living in a very lonely section had accidentally been killed. At five minutes' notice one of the surgeons and a constable were dropping down the river in a little canoe. They covered one hundred and seventy miles of dangerous water, made a conscientious investigation of the entire case, and buried the dead man. That the trip was made at a season when the great river was liable to freeze at any time and leave the men stranded was a detail not to be considered.

Duty comes first with this magnificent force, and that without any pose or pretense. But before I pass to the marvels of their purely police duties, let me say something of their miscellaneous work. For this is various indeed. They are expected to enforce the export tax of two and one half per cent on gold dust. As the train starts from Whitehorse to Skagway, courteous, keen-eyed officers board the car and are not to be denied, no matter how ingenious the smuggler. And the same system is carried out on boats leaving Dawson for the Lower Yukon. Last season the value of the gold dust on which this export tax was paid amounted to $9,932,474.

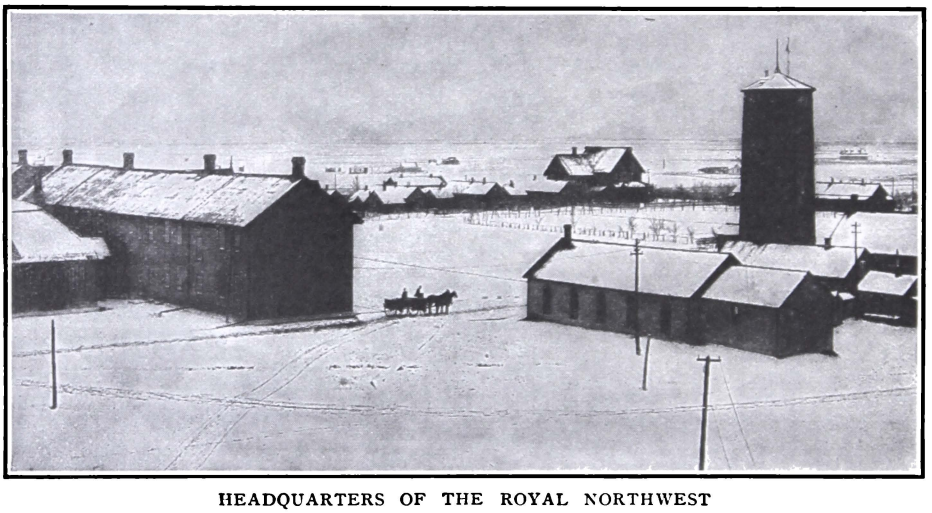
The carrying of the mails, too, to many of the remote mining creeks falls to the lot of the police; and were it not for this service, thousands of white men scattered over this vast and forbidding country in mining and logging camps would be

THE RIDING-MASTER OF THE ROYAL NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE TRAINING ONE OF THE TROOPER'S HORSES

A TROOP OF THE ROYAL NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE—THE FAMOUS BODY WHICH PRESERVES LAW AND ORDER IN A WILDERNESS FIVE TIMES AS LARGE AS GREAT BRITAIN

altogether shut off from the outside world for the greater part of the year.

This brings me to the interesting correspondence received by the police at both headquarters. Every year hundreds, if not thousands, of letters come from many parts of the world inquiring for missing relatives and friends, vaguely "believed to have gone to the Klondike." The Superintendent at Dawson reports that out of two hundred and fifty-four inquiries made for missing persons his staff supplied valuable detailed information in one hundred and three cases. Thus it would really seem as if this handful of men were more in touch with events in this vast wilderness than the police of an ordinary city.



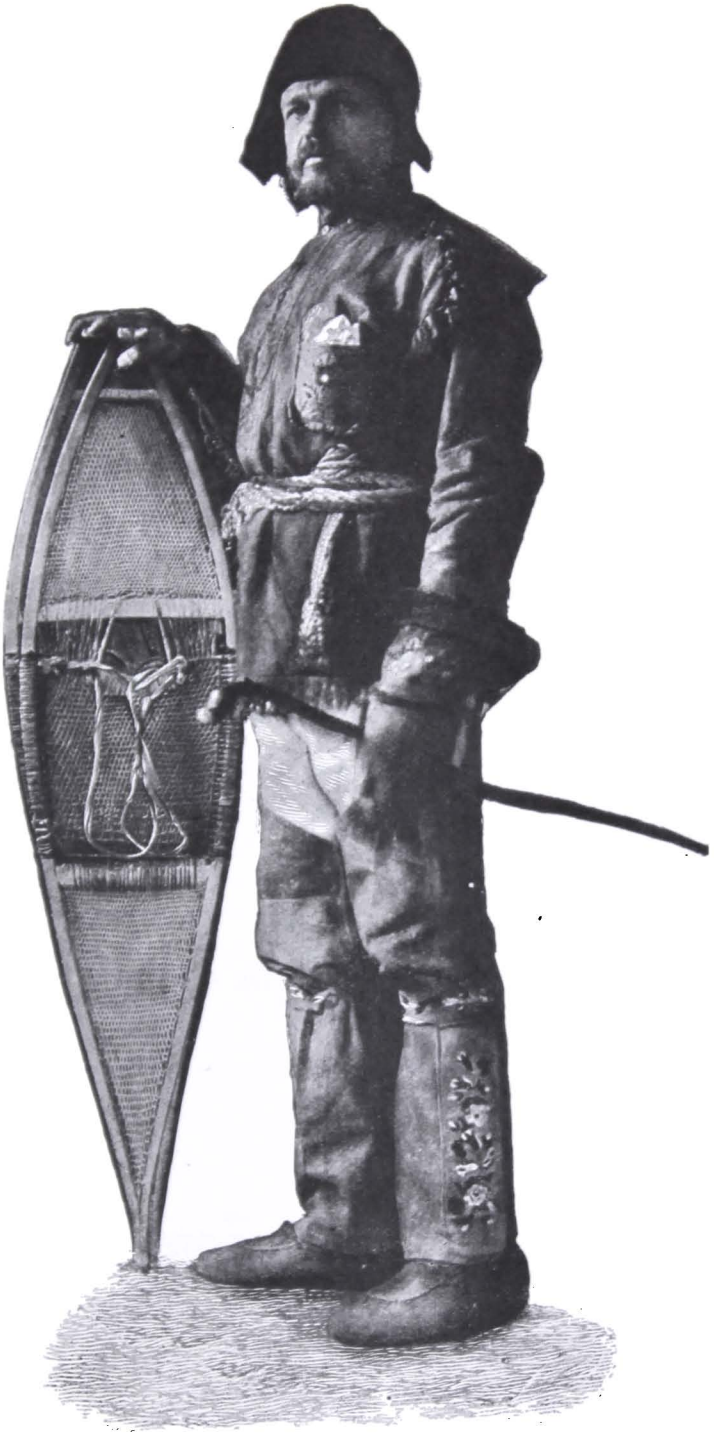
HEADQUARTERS OF THE ROYAL NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE AT REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

The Indians are also looked after, and clothes and rations issued to them by the Northwest Mounted Police, who appear to be ubiquitous. It is little wonder that the needy and suffering, the sick at heart and the failures, as well as the lawless, should know these picturesque fellows. Their summer uniform is a cowboy hat, bright red shirt, and blue trousers, with broad yellow stripes running down and disappearing into high-laced boots.

How the men in the remotest posts contrive to divert themselves in such a wilderness is a marvel. Books and magazines, however, are regularly circulated in all districts; and the officers are all expert in tobogganing, skating, and curling. There are two penitentiaries, one at Dawson and the other at Whitehorse; and last year something like a dozen convict and a hundred common jail prisoners were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in these places. It will be seen at once that these proportions are absurdly small, considering not only the vast size of the Territory, but also its population.

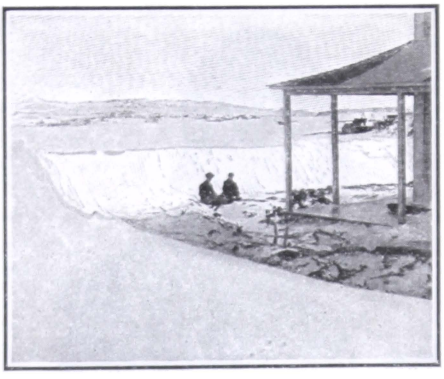
The commissioned officers of the force act as judges, making monthly tours to hold courts at remote stations. Just think of a justice of the peace having to "mush" with a dog team sixty miles a day with the thermometer 70° below zero! The Government insists, however, that no man shall "mush" alone in the depth of winter; neglect of this precaution has caused many a good man to leave his bones in the wilderness.

And that police judge will hold informal court at some desolate spot, perhaps three hundred miles from his starting-point. In case of murder or sudden death he will hold an inquest, or an inquiry into some serious accident. He and his colleagues, too, collect revenue from the lumber camps, act as sanitary officers, take the census, suppress smuggling, assist the telegraph repairers, and accompany the doctors during any epidemic among Indians or Eskimos. All these things and much



AN OFFICER IN WINTER DRESS

more the Northwest Mounted Police do, and do well, without advertisement or any other inducement save that of bare sense of duty. And their thoroughness is such that their very name inspires respect in a wilderness of two thousand miles.



A REMOTE OUTPOST IN THE ARCTIC NORTH

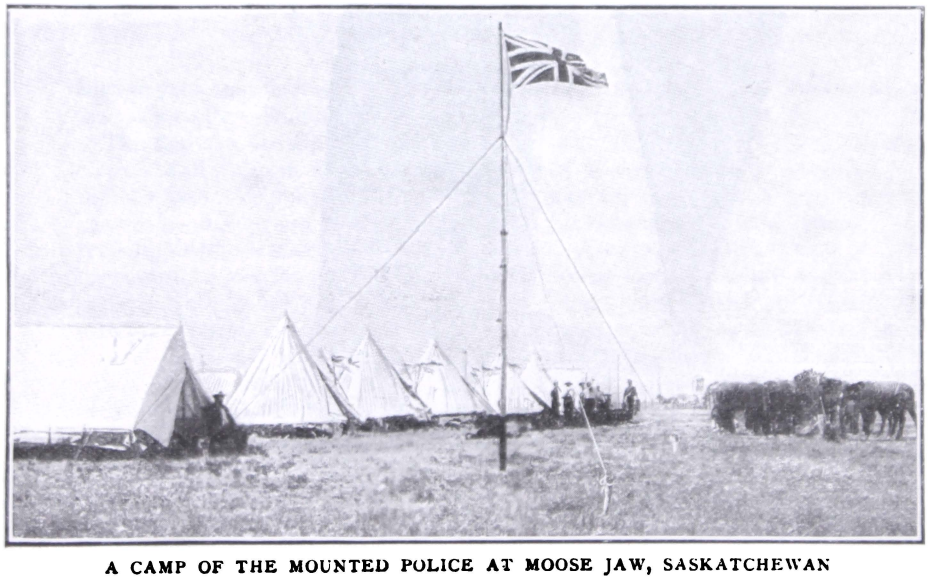
It is little more than ten years since Inspector Constantine and Sergeant Brown were sent from Regina to investigate the smuggling and gold-snatching on the creeks of Forty Mile River. Here they built a fort and were swallowed up. No news of them reached the "outside," as the larger world is called on the Yukon. Certainly the Arctic winter is a pretty effective barrier. Then came the first discovery of gold in Bonanza Creek, and the wild rush to the Klondike, that called imperatively for police reinforcements.

And so gradually these officers drove a line of posts through that vast region, and arranged patrols—widely scattered, it is true; separated by wild expanses of wind-swept snow and mighty ice-choked rivers. But there was always the patient dog team for these immense journeys, and in summer the canoe, or perhaps a horse, almost as knowing as his rider.

And where in all Arctic America will you find "mushers," paddlers, or rough riders like the Northwest Mounted Police? Men of many parts, who may to-day be officially registering a marriage or a death out in the lonely wastes, and to-morrow starting to hunt down a murderer, warn rebellious Indians, or visit a sick miner fallen by the way five hundred miles from anywhere.

Two men, horses and guns; two men, dog team and guns; two men, canoe and guns. Such are the units of this unique police force. To them distance is literally no object. To secure one witness in the strange O'Brien murder trial, Sergeant Frank Smith and Trooper Seeley traveled four hundred miles by dog team and thirteen hundred by canoe! Altogether that case cost these pioneers $225,000.

The great point aimed at is to instill into the lawless the fact that life and



A CAMP OF THE MOUNTED POLICE AT MOOSE JAW, SASKATCHEWAN

property shall be respected in this far-stretching wilderness just as in any great city on the American continent; and, moreover, that the offender shall be secured and brought to justice at any cost whatever.

But Sergeant Smith's quest deserves more than mere passing mention. Two desperate bandits, O'Brien and Graves, lay in wait for and slew in cold blood a couple of miners, Fred Clayson and L. Relfe; these had made their pile and were bound for the distant "outside." With them was Lineman Oleson, of the Telegraph Service, and he too was slaughtered in the silent waste, where the bandits never dreamed of a Nemesis.

Yet O'Brien was caught and hanged. He had evidently murdered his accomplice Graves, and cast his body under the eternal ice of the Yukon, that he might not claim his share of the bloody gold.

Now a witness whose testimony was vital in the case had to be sought somewhere throughout the length and breadth of the Territory. And off went Smith and Seeley from Forty Mile one April day. The trail lay along river ice, which at that time of the year was soft and cut up.

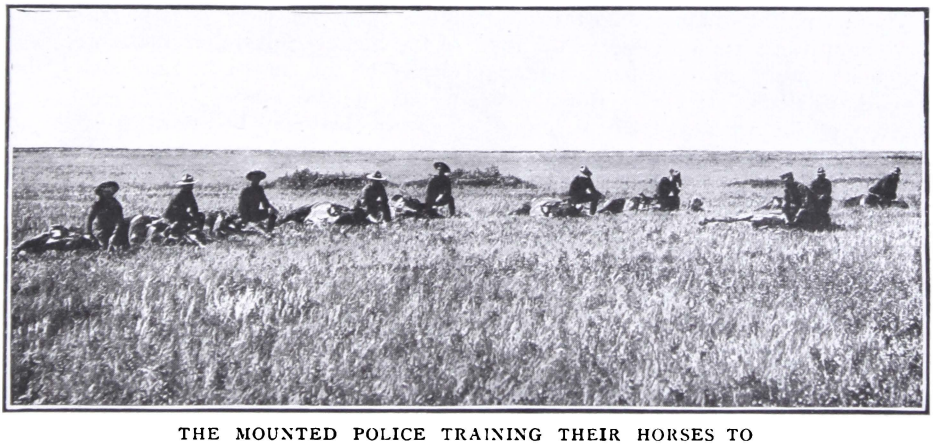
They reached Circle City, and from here Smith went on alone. Some twenty-five miles beyond his dogs fell through one of the open places in the trail; and in the smash-up the lonely man was thrown from the sled and his right leg severely injured. The limb swelled to twice its normal size, yet Smith, mindful of the motto of the force, "mushed" on to Fort Yukon, where an amateur doctor found his leg black and blue from knee to toe.

Nothing could stop the man, however. On he went for fifty miles to the mouth of the Chandelar Creek, over a melting trail in warm weather, with the dogs breaking through the ice from time to time. Returning to Fort Yukon, Smith waited for the giant floes to break up, and soon he was joined once more by Seeley.

The two men started down the giant stream in a twenty-foot canoe, carrying a tent, a little stove, a mast with a leg-of-mutton sail, and a slender outfit of provisions. All the way down they were pioneered by gigantic masses of floating ice. Sailing when there was a fair wind, watching the grinding drifts day and night, pulling with the current when the wind was against them, the two men pushed doggedly on.

Remember, they soon entered a part of the Yukon where the vast river is ten miles wide. Strong head-winds, with heavy seas and roaring ice-masses, made their position a terror by day and night. Yet they never abandoned their frail craft. It was past June ere they reached the river's mouth and started for St. Michael's, another ninety miles off.

The bay was full of towering floes, so that the canoe had frequently to be dragged with harness. Often the two officers would go down through a soft spot, up to the neck in icy water. For



THE MOUNTED POLICE TRAINING THEIR HORSES TO LIE DOWN FOR SKIRMISH PRACTICE ON THE PRAIRIE

many days they had nothing to drink but tea made from the brackish water of Bering Sea; and constant watch had to be kept lest an off-shore breeze haul them out into the ocean.

On reaching St. Michael's they had accomplished a journey of seventeen hundred miles! And every human habitation along that route had been visited, for they were trailing their man all the way. At St. Michael's it was found that the fugitive had gone to Nome and taken steamer thence for Seattle. Thither followed the indefatigable Smith in search of his witness—only to find there telegrams telling that the murderer O'Brien had, after all, been convicted without the long-sought testimony.

This is but a sample of these men's work. Another was the trip to Fort McPherson and back—a thousand miles of awful country in midwinter. It was necessary to maintain communication with that desolate spot, Herschel Island, where the police keep a station in latitude 70° north, to prevent whalers from selling liquor to the Indians.

Three of the crack "mushers" of the force, Constables Mapley, Dever, and Rowley, were selected for this journey, and they started out on Christmas Day with a couple of Indian scouts, each of whom took a team of five dogs, as also did each of the officers. You may be sure those dogs were carefully chosen, powerful and sagacious "huskies" of Porcupine Creek. Each dog weighed from ninety-six to one hundred and fifteen pounds.

There was not so much as a track, so each man wore snow-shoes, while the dog teams were hitched to toboggans instead of sleds. It was a run across the top of the world. "Chute, chute, chute, then up a mile of mountain standing on end!" That is how one of the men described it.

In glissading down icy precipices the dogs would be unharnessed, the best route down picked out by experienced eyes, and then the toboggans, with their precious loads of food, committed to the tremendous slope. The way lay across an unexplored wilderness, yet the most serious accident was that one of the best dogs broke its leg and had to be shot.

The men were thirty-eight days in making the Fort, and only twenty-five in coming back to Dawson, for they found a remarkably short cut at Seela Pass.

One might think that with lawless men here and there in so tremendous a wilderness it would be next to impossible to detect and punish crime. Yet the records of the Yukon show just the contrary. Take the notorious triple murder of June, 1902, committed by the French Canadians, Victor Fournier and Édouard La Belle. The former was a well-known desperado; La Belle had been a decent citizen until he met Fournier. Both had gambled away such gold as they had won, and now planned to go up the Yukon to Whitehorse and there lie in wait for rich passengers whom they might murder on the way down-river to Dawson.

Their victims were three of their own countrymen, who readily agreed to the price for the down-river trip. While in camp near the mouth of the Stewart River, however, La Belle deliberately killed two of the unfortunates with his rifle, and Fournier shot the third. Not until two years later did the river give up the bodies of the victims. The police set to work with characteristic vigor; for, as I have shown, they keep track of all travelers along the Yukon.

Fournier was located in Dawson, but La Belle was apparently lost on the "outside." Then began a man-hunt such as the police of the wilderness love best. La Belle had time to get thousands of miles away, yet Detective W. H. Welsh, of the Secret Service of the force, took charge of the case, and said simply he would "get the man."

From Dawson he went to Seattle, armed with the necessary extradition papers, making inquiries all along the way. How two Édouard La Belles turned up to confuse the detective is a pretty long story. Welsh, however, was joined by P. A. Rook, of Whitehorse, who had known the real La Belle; and the two now began an amazingly thorough search in every logging-camp tributary to Puget Sound. La Belle, it should be explained, had worked on the Yukon as a wood-chopper.

The man was trailed unerringly from Seattle to Butte, Montana. The trail led them next to Spokane, Washington, and thence to Rossland, British Columbia; back again thence southward among the construction gangs working on the Southern Pacific Railroad. We next find Welsh and Rook at Ogden, Utah, and on the Nevada-California line. At each camp visited Rook played the rôle of timekeeper, newly employed in that section. In this capacity he took the names of all the men; and one memorable day he came out of a tent some three miles from Wadsworth, Nevada, and gave Detective Welsh the long-sought signal that his man was within. Sure enough, there was the murderer, sitting on the side of his bunk, having just turned out to work on the night shift.

Welsh walked up, held out his hand as if to shake, and as La Belle reached out, the handcuffs were snapped upon his wrist. Both he and Fournier confessed, but were hanged all the same. The long and patient quest cost at least $25,000. But then the Northwest Mounted Police "got the man," and it is the realization of that motto, with the Samaritan rôle already detailed, that has made their name respected throughout the wilderness.

NEW LIFE

BY EDITH LIVINGSTON SMITH

A fire swept the forest growth away—
  All the green thicket deeds of tender Earth;
  And every sapling Hope had given birth
Burned red, then white, and crumbled to decay;
While blackened trees stood stark in mute dismay.

So like our lives, consumed by some distress,
  When trusting hearts, blithe in the spring of youth,
  Are blasted by the flames of Sorrow's truth
And withered in Pain's fire of faithlessness—
Until where Beauty bloomed no man can guess.

Yet, lo! a miracle when time is told:—
  As trees and flowers shall bless that sod again
  And lift their fervent lips to summer's rain,
So may our hearts arise from ashes cold,
To give new growth to God a thousandfold.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRADLEY

MRS. EDITH WHARTON