THE GREAT MIGRATION

while procuring the skin of this interesting quadruped. The old she surrounded. They had been for some days on the   
lookout for a white bear, and had made several excursions from the port going as far as the mouth of the seal river.  
which runs into hudson’s bay a little farther to the north. On all these excursions they had been unsuccessful; for,  
although they had several times come upon the track of the bears, and had even seen them at a distance, they were  
unable in a single instance to get within shot. The difficulty arose from the level nature of the ground, and its being  
quite destitute of trees or other cover, under which they might approach the animals. The country around fort churchill  
is of this character and indeed along the whole western shore of hudson’s bay, where the soil is a low alluviom, without  
either rocks or hills. This formation runs landward for about a hundred miles constituting a strip of marshy soil, which  
separates the sea from a parallel limestone formation further inward. Then succeed the primitive rocks, which cover a  
large interior tract of country, known as the barred grounds. It is only on the low belt adjoining the coast that the polar  
bear is found but the females range quite across to the skirts of the woods which cover the limestone formation. Our   
hunters therefore knew that either upon the shore itself, or upon the low alluvial tract adjoining it, they would have to  
search for their game: and to this district they confined their search. On the fifth day they made a more extended  
excursion towards the interior. It was now the season of midsummer, when the old males range up the banks of the  
streams: partly with the design of catching a few freshwater fish, partly to nibble at the sweet berries, but above all to   
meet the females, who just then, with their half grown cubs, come coyly seaward to meet their old friends of the  
previous year, and introduce their offspring to their fathers, who up to this hour have not set eyes on them. On the   
present excursion our hunters were more fortunate than before: since they not only witnessed a reunion of this sort,  
but succeeded in making a capture of the whole family, father, mother, and cubs. They had on this occasion gone up the   
churchill river, and were ascending a branch stream that runs into the latter, some miles above the fort. Their mode of  
travelling was in a birch bark canoe: for horses are almost unknown in the territory of the hudson’s bay company,  
excepting in those parts of it that consist of prairie. Throughout most of this region the only means of travelling is by  
canoes and boats, which are managed by men who follow it as a calling, and who are styled voyageurs. They are nearly all  
of canadian origin many of them half breeds, and extremely skilful in the navigation of the lakes and rivers of this  
untrodden wilderness. Of course most of them are in the employ of the hudson’s bay company; and when not actually  
engaged in voyaging do a little hunting and trapping on their own account. Of these voyageurs kindly furnished by the  
chief factor at the fort propelled the canoe which carried our young hunters: so that with pouchskin there were men in  
the little craft. This was nothing however, as birch bark canoes are used in the territory of a much larger kind some that  
will even carry tons of merchandise and a great many men. Along the bank of the stream into which they had now  
entered grew a selvage of willows here and there forming leafy thickets that were impenetrable to the eye; but in other  
places standing so thinly, that the plains beyond them could be seen out of the canoe. It was a likely enough place for   
white bears to be found in especially at this season, when, as already stated, the old males go inland to meet the females,  
as well as to indulge in a little vegetable diet, after having confined themselves all the rest of the year to fish and seal  
flesh. The voyageurs said that there were many bulbous roots growing in those low meadows of which the bears are very  
fond; and also larvae of certain insects, found in heaps, like anthills which by bruin are esteemed a delicacy of the rarest  
kind. For this reason our hunters were regarding the land on both sides of the stream, occasionally standing up in the  
canoe to reconnoitre over the tops of the willows, or peering through them where they grew thinly. While passing  
opposite one of the breaks in the willow grove, a spectacle came before their eyes that caused them to order the canoe  
to be stopped, and the voyageurs to rest on their oars. Alexis, who had been upon the lookout, at first did not know  
what to make of the spectacle: so odd was the grouping of the figures that composed it. He could see a large number of   
animals of quadrupedal form, but of different colours. Some were nearly white, others brown or reddish brown, and  
several were quite black. All appeared to have long shaggy hair, cocked ears, and large bushy tails. They were not standing  
at rest, but moving about now running rapidly from point to point , now leaping up in the air, while some were rushing  
round in circles in all there appeared to be or of them; and they covered a space of ground about as large as a drawing  
room floor. There was slight haze or mist hanging over the meadow, which hindered alexis from having a clear view of   
these animals: and, through the magnifying influence of this sort of atmosphere, they appeared as large as young oxen.

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