

RADISSON'S TWO WESTERN JOURNEYS

When the French in the beginning of the seventeenth century took possession of the St. Lawrence Valley, the acquisition does not seem to have been considered an event of major importance. The population of the home country was not yet so dense as to demand new territory for expansion. For many years, moreover, there was doubt that agriculture would prove profitable in a climate so much more severe than that of France. The acquisition of Canada was therefore considered of dubious value except by a few missionaries, and the royal government was very slow in granting any assistance for the safety or progress of the new colony.

Soon, however, it was discovered that this American possession could supply one great need of the home country, and that was furs. Particularly was it rich in beaver, which was in great demand for beaver hats—the headgear demanded by fashion. The fur trade therefore became the mainstay of the colony and gained for it the few crumbs of favor that it received. For many years this trade was confined to the small tribes on the rivers that empty into the St. Lawrence from the north. Then came a larger supply of furs from the more populous Huron country and from the Ottawa on Manitoulin Island. Each spring when the Indians brought in their canoes filled with peltries, small fairs were held in Montreal and Three Rivers, where the natives exchanged their furs for the utensils, tools, ornaments, and dainties that the French merchants and habitants had to offer. But this business was too profitable to be left in the hands of the general public. In 1645 a company of the colony was organized for the purpose of monopolizing the fur trade. Concessions were obtained

from the authorities in France which gave this first trust in America the exclusive right to export furs. The business was systematized and yielded substantial profits to the trust, but it gave great dissatisfaction to those outside who were virtually debarred from trading in furs.

But then came the great war of the Iroquois. The Indians of the northland were panic-stricken and dared not risk themselves and their peltries on the river highways exposed to the attacks of the prowling Iroquois. For several years no peltries came in and the fur company was ruined. The end of the fur trade seemed to have come and with it the end of the colony.

In this darkest hour, in 1654, a large fleet of Ottawa and Hurons arrived from the islands in the mouth of Green Bay with canoes laden with furs. Joyous in a victory of the year before over the terrible Iroquois, they brought not only furs, but also the news of a vast new storehouse of riches beyond the Great Lakes. Among the many who looked with fond eyes upon these treasures was a man by the name of Médard Chouart, better-known as the *Sieur des Groseilliers*, of Three Rivers. For many years he had served the missionaries in the Huron country as a man-of-all-work, and he could therefore speak with these visiting Indians in their own language. With him was his wife's brother, Pierre Esprit Radisson, a gay young soldier of fortune eighteen years of age. At this time prospective fur traders were not required to have a license, but as Chouart was sergeant-major of the garrison at Three Rivers, it was necessary for him to obtain leave of absence from the governor, Jean de Lauzon. As the latter was the chief representative of the Hundred Associates—the French company which held a royal concession for the Canadian fur trade—he was eager to stimulate the trade in the new western regions and granted the permission at once. Quickly gathering arms, ammunition, and articles

of trade, Chouart and his brother-in-law departed with the Indians on August 6, 1654. They were the first white men to venture into the West after Jean Nicolet made the trip twenty years earlier. Their destination, like his, was the Green Bay region.

These two men were the first of a class that later became numerous — the *coureurs de bois*, easy-going, fearless young wanderers of the woods, who bluffed their way among the superstitious Indians "as gods and devils of the earth" for the purpose of getting rich in peltries. Such, at least, seems to have been the character of Radisson, the chronicler of the expedition. Chouart, who was much older and could speak the Huron language, was probably the leader, but little is known of him, as Radisson in his narrative monopolized the limelight. Chouart made notes during the journey, but these were lost on the return trip. More has been written about the two brief visits of these men into the West than about any of the other early pathfinders.¹

The reason for this is that Radisson, who about ten years later wrote his account of their wanderings, is as rambling in his narrative as he was in his occupation. His chronology is hopeless; parenthetical digressions a page or two in length are put in without warning, to the confusion of the reader; harrowing experiences of other travelers are plagiarized to make a dramatic and picturesque story; and hearsay reports of distant places are interpolated as if per-

¹ For some of the more recent accounts of Radisson and Groseilliers, see Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The French Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*, 101-138 (Madison, 1925); Albert M. Goodrich, "The Radisson Problem: The Prairie Island Case," *ante*, 13: 245-255; Grace L. Nute, "The Radisson Problem: Another Interpretation," *ante*, 13: 255-267; Henry Colin Campbell, "Radisson and Groseilliers: Problems in Early Western History," in *American Historical Review*, 1: 226-237 (January, 1896); and Warren Upham, "Groseilliers and Radisson, the First White Men in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 449-594 (part 2). The last study includes a Radisson bibliography of 107 titles that is complete up to 1904 (p. 568-594).

sonally seen. Various writers, reading this medley of fact and fiction, have concluded that these two travelers not only discovered the Mississippi River, but sailed down it to the sunny South with its citrous fruits and eternal summer in one direction, and penetrated to the Rocky Mountains, Rainy Lake, Hudson Bay, and Nova Scotia in other directions. As all these imaginary events could not be crowded into the time spent on the two journeys, Radisson solved the difficulty by apparently adding an extra year to each of the two journeys, which has greatly added to the troubles of the commentators.

One of the principal problems in the study of the Radisson narratives is the question of the dates and duration of his two western journeys. These and other journeys of Radisson were so crowded with new impressions and dramatic experiences that his recollection of them after a lapse of ten or more years naturally became confused. His own chronology is therefore very unreliable. But by checking his narratives with entries in the contemporary journal of the Jesuits, it is possible to fix the time of these expeditions definitely.

We shall take as a starting point the date August 21, 1660, when Monseigneur Laval met Chouart and his company of Ottawa Indians in Montreal. They had arrived two days earlier from Lake Superior with sixty canoes filled with furs valued at two hundred thousand livres.² The canoes were all large, with five men in each. Five hundred Indians in a hundred canoes had left Lake Superior, but forty canoes had turned back because their occupants feared the Iroquois. The chronicler also states that Chouart "had gone to their [*the Ottawa's*] country *the preceding year*."³

² The livre had the same value as did the franc before the World War, — about twenty cents, — but in Radisson's time it had a much greater purchasing value.

³ Reuben G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 45: 161–163 (Cleveland, 1899). The italics are the author's.

Father Lalemant reports that he met two Frenchmen who had just returned from the West at Quebec shortly after August 1, 1660. He writes:

Scarcely had I returned to Quebec when I found two Frenchmen there who had but just arrived from those upper countries, with three hundred Algonkins, in sixty canoes loaded with furs. Following is an account of what they saw with their own eyes. . . .

They passed *the winter* on the shores of Lake Superior, and were fortunate enough to baptize there two hundred little children. . . . forty went straight to Heaven, dying soon after Baptism.

During *their winter season*, our two Frenchmen made divers excursions to the surrounding tribes. Among other things, they saw, six days' journey beyond the lake toward the Southwest, a tribe composed of the remnants of the Hurons of the Tobacco Nation, who have been compelled by the Iroquois to forsake their native land, and bury themselves so deep in the forests that they cannot be found by their enemies. These poor people—fleeing and pushing their way over mountains and rocks, through these vast unknown forests—fortunately encountered a beautiful River, large, wide, deep, and worthy of comparison, *they say*, with our great river St. Lawrence.⁴

These two statements from different witnesses show that the two Frenchmen spent only one winter in the West on this journey. In support of this also may be mentioned the fact that no western Indians with whom the two travelers might have returned to the West visited the colony in 1658, because in that year an Iroquois army of twelve hundred men was ravaging the upper country. But in the summer of 1659, two fleets of canoes which had taken a long, round-about route in order to avoid the Iroquois arrived from the Great Lakes. One of them consisted of six canoes of Saulteux, or Chippewa, who had spent five months on the journey. They asked for "some frenchmen to escort them on their return."⁵ Radisson states definitely that he and his brother-in-law returned to the West with seven canoes of Saulteux who had arrived in August by way of the Maurice River and the northern route "wth incred-

⁴ *Jesuit Relations*, 45: 233-235. The italics are the author's.

⁵ *Jesuit Relations*, 44: 205-219; 45: 109.

ible paines.”⁶ This is, therefore, conclusive evidence that the two Frenchmen departed for the West in the early part of August, 1659.

Many commentators have thought that this was the first expedition of Chouart and Radisson into the West, placing the second expedition in the years 1661–63.⁷ This conclusion is impossible, however, for two reasons: First, the Jesuits, in their journal for May, 1662, state that early in that month Groseilliers and ten other men were on a voyage down the St. Lawrence, passing Quebec, with the intention of going to Hudson Bay either in canoes by way of the Saguenay, or possibly in a sailing vessel around Labrador.⁸ And, second, Radisson in his narrative of the *second* western journey gives a detailed description of his visit to the Hurons, which, according to Lalemant, took place in the winter of 1659–60. To this Radisson adds the following:

To augment our misery we receive news of the Octanaks, who weare about a hundred and fifty, wth their families. They had a quarell wth y^e hurrons in the Isle where we had come from some years before in the lake of the stairing hairs.⁹

⁶ *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson, Being an Account of His Travels and Experiences among the North American Indians, from 1652 to 1684*, 175 (Boston, 1885).

⁷ Among these are N.-E. Dionne, “Chouart et Radisson,” in Royal Society of Canada, *Proceedings and Transactions*, 11: 115–135, 12: 29–48 (1893, 1894); George Bryce, “The Further History of Pierre Esprit Radisson,” and Benjamin Sulte, “Découverte du Mississipi en 1659” and “Radisson in the Northwest, 1661–63,” in Royal Society of Canada, *Proceedings and Transactions*, vol. 4, section 2, p. 53–66; vol. 9, section 1, p. 3–25; and vol. 10, section 2, p. 224–230 (second series, 1898, 1903, 1904); and J. V. Brower, *Memoirs of Explorations in the Basin of the Mississippi*, vol. 6 (St. Paul, 1903).

⁸ *Jesuit Relations*, 47:279. It is probable that Chouart and Radisson journeyed to Hudson Bay by the canoe route at this time, as they claimed to have done a few years later in England. See Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay by the Dobbs Galley and California, in the Years 1746 and 1747*, 71–77 (London, 1748). This is affirmed also in a letter of Governor Denonville, dated at Quebec, November 8, 1686, which is printed in E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York*, 9: 305 (Albany, 1857).

⁹ Radisson, *Voyages*, 203.

Radisson here plainly states that he had made an earlier journey *some years before* midwinter of 1660 to the Hurons and Ottawa, then living on an island in "the lake of the stairing hairs," as he calls Lake Michigan. This journey could not therefore have taken place in 1658-59. Nor could it have taken place in 1657, for Radisson was then an interpreter among the Iroquois. On July 26, 1657, Radisson, with some other Frenchmen, set out on a journey to the Iroquois from which they did not return until April 3, 1658.¹⁰

Finally, the first journey of Radisson and Chouart could not have taken place in the years from 1651 to 1654. Radisson arrived in Canada on May 24, 1651. The next spring, 1652, while hunting, he was captured by the Mohawk, was adopted into their tribe, and had many strange adventures. About November 1, 1653, he escaped to the Dutch at Fort Orange, now Albany, and later made his way to Holland and France. He returned to Canada on May 15, 1654.¹¹ There remains, therefore, as the only time when he could have made his first western journey, the period between May 15, 1654, and July 26, 1657.

Radisson writes that the first western journey occupied three years. His detailed description of the journey up the Ottawa River corresponds almost precisely with the experiences of the trading fleet which went west in 1656, carrying as passengers the missionaries Gareau and Dreuilletes. These two items in Radisson's narrative have led the eminent historian, Dr. Louise P. Kellogg, to advance the ingenious hypothesis that Radisson did not accompany his brother-in-law in 1654 but joined him in 1656, when he had the adventures recorded, and returned in 1657. Radisson in his narrative is supposed by Dr. Kellogg to have treated Chouart's journey in 1654-56 and his own journey

¹⁰ Radisson, *Voyages*, 6.

¹¹ Radisson, *Voyages*, 82-86.

in company with Chouart in 1656-57 as one journey covering three years.¹²

This theory is not tenable, however, because the parish records of Three Rivers show that Chouart was in that village in November, 1656. He is also reported to have been in Three Rivers on September 26, 1656.¹³ Moreover, the only trading fleet which arrived from the West in 1657 was a band of mixed Indians who arrived at Three Rivers on November 17. As Radisson left on his excursion to the Iroquois on July 26, 1657, he could not have been with this fleet from the West. Furthermore, Radisson states that upon his return from his first western journey, he and his brother-in-law "stayed att home att rest y^t yeare [1656-57]." ¹⁴

Disregarding the remote possibility that Radisson's narrative of his first expedition into the West is a piece of fiction from beginning to end, it is evident that the first journey began on August 6, 1654, and ended in midsummer of 1656. The second journey began in the early part of August, 1659, and ended on August 19, 1660.

The similarity between the adventures that Radisson describes in connection with his first journey to the West and those which are related of the missionaries who departed in 1656 is easily explained. While staying at home to rest during the fall of 1656, Radisson probably talked with some of the survivors of the ill-fated expedition. Many years later when writing his narrative, he probably appropriated to himself the experiences of the missionaries in 1656 in order to make his story colorful. This plagiarism is slight compared with his claim that he and Chouart made *annual* visits to the Chippewa.¹⁵ Since at the time when he was writing he was endeavoring to interest the

¹² Radisson, *Voyages*, 105-109.

¹³ Campbell and Sulte, in Brower, *Memoirs of Exploration*, 6: 70, 75.

¹⁴ *Jesuit Relations*, 44: 201; Radisson, *Voyages*, 172.

¹⁵ Radisson, *Voyages*, 149.

English court in exploiting the Hudson Bay region, which could be reached by sailing vessels, the emphasis on the dangers of the land route was an argument in favor of his project.

When the Indians with whom Chouart and Radisson traveled on the first western journey reached Georgian Bay at the mouth of French River, they separated into two parties. Seven canoes followed the north shore of the lake. These were probably occupied by Chippewa returning to their home at the Sault, not far away. The larger party, numbering about thirty canoes of Hurons and Ottawa, followed the shore of Lake Huron to the southern end, and then continued along its southwestern shore to the west end of the lake. This detour made their journey almost four hundred miles longer than if they had followed the usual course along Manitoulin Island. But they evidently feared an ambush by the Iroquois at some camping place along the shorter route.

Radisson writes: "After we travelled many dayes we arrived att a large island where we found their village," that is, the village of the Ottawa and Hurons with whom he was traveling.¹⁶ Several writers have made the curious mistake of assuming that this island was Manitoulin Island, which once was the home of the Ottawa. It is not difficult to show that this assumption is erroneous. When the Ottawa and Hurons circled clear around the south end of Lake Huron, they were avoiding Manitoulin Island as much as they could, not journeying toward it. When they left French River and rounded the Bruce peninsula to turn southward, they had already skirted the eastern shore of Manitoulin Island for twenty miles. They had reason to fear that their unprotected villages would be attacked by Iroquois, which, as we shall see later, actually happened. If their villages were on Manitoulin Island, they were prac-

¹⁶ Radisson, *Voyages*, 146.

tically within sight of them when passing it, and they would not make an idle and dangerous journey of four hundred miles in September when squalls are frequent.

Finally, they were not heading for Manitoulin Island because there were neither Hurons nor Ottawa there at the time. Perrot writes that in 1651 another Iroquois invasion "spread terror among the Outaoüas and their allies, who were at Sankinon [*Saginaw*], at Thunder Bay, and at Manitoaletz [*Manitoulin Island*] and Michillimakinak. They went to dwell together among the Hurons, on the island which we call Huron Island." Huron Island is Washington Island near the north end of the Door County peninsula at the mouth of Green Bay. The Indians were still there in 1656, when the two Frenchmen made their report of the distribution of the tribes of the West.¹⁷

Immediately after mentioning the arrival at this island, Radisson adds: "You must know that we passed a strait some 3 leagues beyond that place." The pointed reference to this strait is probably an indication of the vivid memory he had of the turbulent strait between Washington Island and the Door County peninsula—a strait so dangerous to navigation, that from time immemorial it has been known as *Porte des Morts*—the "Door of Death." The fact that the village of the Ottawa and Hurons was about three leagues—seven miles—from the strait indicates that the village was at Little Lake in the northwest corner of the island. Two well-marked village sites have been found there.

Shortly after the arrival of Radisson and Chouart at Washington Island, it was learned that a party of Iroquois had been discovered "att the great field." Radisson with others set out to meet them. After they had searched for

¹⁷ Emma H. Blair, ed., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Region of the Great Lakes, as described by Nicolas Perrot*, 1: 148 (Cleveland, 1911); *Jesuit Relations*, 41: 78; 44: 245-249; 55: 100, 102; 56: 115; Nute, *ante*, 13: 259.

a couple of days, the Iroquois' hiding place was discovered. "We played the game so furiously," writes Radisson, "that none escaped. The day following we returned to our village wth 8 of our enemys dead and 3 alive. The dead weare eaten & the living weare burned wth a small fire to the rigour of cruelties." In order that there should be no misunderstanding as to where this skirmish took place he adds that "We weare then possessed by the hurrons and Octanac [*Ottawa*]; but our minde was not to stay in an island, but to be knowne wth the remotest people."¹⁸

From various remarks scattered through Radisson's narrative and in the *Jesuit Relations*, it would appear that Washington Island at that time had a population of more than a thousand Ottawa and Hurons. It seems surprising that such a large number of Indians could have found their living on an island as small as this. But Radisson explains this by saying that these Indians were not interested in hunting, but made their living almost wholly by fishing.¹⁹ As the waters around Washington Island have always been known for good fishing, the explanation seems sufficient.

The two fur traders, according to Radisson, won great honor by their victory over the Iroquois. The Potawatomi invited them to come to their great village, Méchingan, and there they spent the winter. Evidently they were well treated, for Radisson writes:

I can assure you I liked noe country as I have that wherein we wintered; ffor whatever a man could desire was to be had in great plenty; viz. staggs, fishes in abundance, & all sort of meat, corne enough. Those of the 2 nations [*the Hurons and the Ottawa*] would not come wth us, but turned back to their nation.²⁰

In the spring the travelers were taken by the Potawatomi to their kinsmen, the Prairie Potawatomi or Mascoutens. To get to them it was necessary to travel by canoe from

¹⁸ Radisson, *Voyages*, 147.

¹⁹ Radisson, *Voyages*, 155; *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 181.

²⁰ Radisson, *Voyages*, 150.

the village of Méchingan, near the present Jacksonport, Wisconsin, southward along the shore of Lake Michigan to the Sturgeon Bay portage, and then up Green Bay and the Fox River to the Mascoutens, who lived, according to the report of the two travelers to Father Dreuilletes, "six or seven days' journey Southwest by South from St. Michel [*Méchingan*]." ²¹

As the two travelers arrived in the West in the autumn of 1654 and returned in the spring of 1656, they had only one summer—that of 1655—at their disposal. Radisson states that his brother-in-law, owing to illness, was obliged to remain in the camp during the summer, where he spent his time in growing a large crop of corn. This was to provide the Indians with plenty of provisions for the return trip to Lower Canada, as he probably knew from his long experience with them that they often ran short of food on the journey. Radisson writes: "Y^e summer I went a hunting, & my brother stayed where he was welcome & putt up a great deale of Indian corne." ²² It is clear that under the circumstances Radisson must have done his hunting in the immediate vicinity (of the Mascoutens?), not only because it would have been inhuman to have left his sick brother-in-law for the duration of a long journey, but also because Radisson, who was then only nineteen years old and unacquainted with the language and disposition of the western Indians, would have had no inclination to travel far alone.

This enforced idleness provided poor material for travel sketches with which to astound the people at home, and Radisson has therefore at this point introduced an imaginary account of a journey to the Gulf of Mexico. He writes:

²¹ *Jesuit Relations*, 44: 249; H. R. Holand, "St. Michael, the First Mission of the West," in *Mid-America*, 16: 157-164 (January, 1934).

²² Radisson, *Voyages*, 158.

We meet wth severall nations, all sedentary, amazed to see us, & weare very civil. The further we sejournd the delightfuller the land was to us. I can say that [in] my lifetime I never saw a more incomparable country, for all I have been in Italy; yett Italy comes short of it, as I think, when it was inhabited, & now forsaken of the wildmen. Being about the great sea [*the Gulf of Mexico*], we conversed wth people that dwelleth about the salt water, who tould us that they saw some great white thing sometimes uppon the water, & came towards the shore, & men in the top of it, and made a noise like a company of swans; w^{ch} made me believe that they weare mistaken, for I could not imagine what it could be, except the Spaniard; & the reason is that we found a barill broken as they use in Spaine.²⁸

Radisson had a fair imagination, but he could not visualize the boundless prairies, the strange flora, or the new physiography that separated him from the Gulf of Mexico, being unfamiliar with such conceptions. The only things he could conjure up in keeping with a journey of such magnitude was a Spanish galleon and a floating barrel of Spanish type. This shows how colorless and empty is the whole account. In the following paragraph he adds some more details, but they do not help any. "We found no sea-serpents. . . . The grape is very bigg, greene, is seene there att all times. It never snows nor freezes there, but mighty hot." Yet, to prove that he is not an indiscriminating observer, he adds that "the lemons are not so bigg as ours and sower."

Such excursions into the realm of fiction are frequent in Radisson's narrative. For instance, to balance his account of his journey to the Gulf of Mexico on his first journey, he introduces an equally fictitious account of a trip to Hudson Bay on his second journey. The report is almost devoid of local color. His one attempt at such is enough to disprove the truth of it. He asserts that although Hudson Bay lies very far north, it gets very hot up there, so hot that it is possible to cook eggs by putting them in the sand on the beach. Radisson tried the experiment, but left the

²⁸ Radisson, *Voyages*, 151.

eggs for half an hour. The result was that they were cooked as hard as stones!²⁴

The part of Radisson's narrative that tells of the journey along the shore of Lake Huron, the arrival among the Hurons and Ottawa on Washington Island, the adventures there, the winter spent among the Potawatomi, the trip to the Mascoutens the following spring, and Chouart's incapacity for travel during the following summer gives a fairly clear picture of the travels of the two Frenchmen up to the autumn of 1655 and is easily followed by one familiar with the geography, history, and archeology of the region. After this—omitting the romance about the trip to the Gulf of Mexico—comes an account of a canoe trip on Lake Superior and meetings with the Chippewa, the Sioux, and the Cree. It is probable that this account does not belong in the narrative of the first journey for two reasons. In the first place, it could not have taken place until after Chouart's corn was harvested and husked, that is, in October, when a canoe trip on the Great Lakes would be almost impossible owing to the prevailing storms. In the second place, it seems almost certain from a passage in the second narrative that the two travelers did not visit the Sault de Ste. Marie until they made their second journey into the West. In the second narrative Radisson writes of their approach to the Sault thus: "Wee . . . found the truth of what those men had often [said], that if once we could come to that place [*the Sault*] we should make good cheare of a fish that they call *Assickmack*, w^{ch} signifieth a white fish." If Radisson had visited the Sault in 1655, he would not have told of it and its inevitable whitefish as a new experience in 1659.²⁵ The probable explanation is that when

²⁴ Radisson, *Voyages*, 225.

²⁵ Radisson, *Voyages*, 187. Another indication that the two travelers did not visit the Sault or Lake Superior on their first journey is the fact that they made no mention of the Chippewa in the extensive enumeration of western tribes which they made to Father Dreuilletes upon their return in 1656. See *Jesuit Relations*, 44: 245-249.

he wrote his reminiscences — blurred in detail by a lapse of ten years — in his first narrative, he intended to give an account of the second journey. This is plainly indicated by comprised three years. Realizing his shortcomings as a narrator, he wrote some *years later* a new and much fuller account of the second journey. This is plainly indicated by the improved diction of the later narrative.

To the second journey thus belongs that much disputed passage wherein Radisson says: "By the persuasion of som of them we went into y^e great river that divides itselfe in 2, where the hurrons wth some Ottanake & the wild men that had warrs wth them had retired."²⁶ The Hurons and Ottawa did not retreat into western Wisconsin until 1657, nor did the two explorers see the Mississippi, "the great river," either on their first or second voyage, as some commentators have thought.²⁷ In his report to Father Lalemant, Chouart made no claim to having seen the river, but reported its existence, rather doubtfully, on the authority only of the fugitive Hurons. He says: "These poor people [*the Hurons and Ottawa*] . . . fortunately encountered a beautiful River, large, wide, deep, and worthy of comparison, *they say*, with our great river St. Lawrence."²⁸

The accounts of the trips to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River, and Lake Superior in the first narrative may be rejected, the first two as being plagiarisms of stories told by others, the last as belonging to Radisson's second journey. There remains then a journey to the Hurons and Ottawa on Washington Island, a winter spent with the Potawatomi on the Door County peninsula, and the following summer, and possibly the winter, passed with the Mascoutens or other tribes in the Green Bay region and west of

²⁶ Radisson, *Voyages*, 167.

²⁷ See particularly Upham, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 462-467, and Goodrich, *ante*, 13: 245-255.

²⁸ *Jesuit Relations*, 45: 235; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 13 (St. Paul, 1921).

Lake Winnebago. It is a grave misconception of the character and purpose of these two travelers to assume that they made any such extensive journeys as are claimed for them. They were not explorers in the modern sense, urged by a scientific purpose to search out the mysteries of a new world. They were just plain fur traders animated by no higher desire than to get rich. In their search of furs, they could have found no better place than the Green Bay region, which had just been settled by numerous tribes fleeing before the Iroquois. To have wandered off to other distant regions would not only have invited new dangers, but would have been a waste of time and toil and a neglect of comfort and of opportunities for trade.

Early in the spring of 1656 the two travelers, eager to return to their home on the St. Lawrence, returned to their "first landing Isle." It has been suggested that this refers to Prairie Island in the Mississippi between Red Wing and Hastings.²⁹ There is no evidence whatever to support this supposition. The context shows that this "first landing isle" was near the Potawatomi, who lived on the Door County peninsula. "The first landing Isle" can therefore only mean "*the island where we first landed*" in the West, that is, Washington Island, which is the only island mentioned by Radisson. This is conclusively proved by the next sentence, "*There we weare well received againe.*" They were therefore returning to an island where they had previously been entertained. The only island previously mentioned by Radisson is the island where the travelers first disembarked and were entertained by the Hurons and the Ottawa — that is, Washington Island.³⁰

Upon arriving at this island, where the Hurons and the

²⁹ This theory was first suggested by Henry Colin Campbell, in his *Exploration of Lake Superior*, 25 (*Parkman Club Publications*, no. 2 — 1896). It was much elaborated later by Upham, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 462-466.

³⁰ Radisson, *Voyages*, 158; Nute, *ante*, 13: 262.

Ottawa were still living, Chouart and Radisson organized a great trading fleet. "We weare in number about 500," says Radisson, "all stout men." But according to the report for that year in the *Jesuit Relations*, there were only two hundred and fifty men in fifty canoes.³¹ Radisson thus seems to be again referring to the second trip in 1660, when he and Chouart were accompanied by five hundred men in a hundred canoes, although forty turned back while on the journey.

Even with this smaller number of canoes, the two Frenchmen conducted the largest delivery of furs that had ever reached the lower St. Lawrence in one consignment. Moreover, the shipment opened alluring visions of expanding trade to the merchants of the French colony. While Nicolet had visited the same part of the West twenty years earlier, his excessive modesty seems to have hindered him from saying much about it. But Chouart and Radisson in 1656 brought back detailed reports of the western tribes, amplified by their own exuberant eulogies of this new part of the world.³² So alluring were the pictures of the western country that, when the western Indians in a few days were ready to depart, no less than thirty-one French fur traders bought goods and departed with them. But the wily Iroquois were as usual waiting to take their toll of lives from the venturesome tribesmen of the West, and even before the thirty-one argonauts reached Montreal, dismayed by the dangers that threatened them, they were glad to crawl ashore.

In spite of constant perils, however, the return of Chouart and Radisson opened up a new world of enterprise to the French and inaugurated the greatest period of activity and prosperity that they enjoyed in America. It was fit-

³¹ Radisson, *Voyages*, 162; *Jesuit Relations*, 42:219-221. The men were practically all Hurons and Ottawa.

³² Recorded in *Jesuit Relations*, 44:245-249.

ting that the return of the two travelers should have been greeted with the thunder of cannon and the plaudits of colonial officials. Their neighbors hailed them as heroes, and in a few days, when their furs were sold, they found themselves the possessors of respectable fortunes. Chouart was further rewarded by being promoted to the post of captain of the garrison of Three Rivers.³³

All this honor and prosperity seems to have turned his head. Up to this time his name had been Médard Chouart, and, if one may judge by his writing and spelling, he was nearly an illiterate man.³⁴ He now bought a piece of wild land near Three Rivers, known locally as *des groseilliers*, that is, "the gooseberry patch." Feeling that a landed gentleman of his wealth and dignity should have a baronetcy, he assumed the title of *Sieur des Groseilliers*, which was immediately adopted by the people who knew him, probably in good-natured derision of his vain pretensions. His self-importance even led him so far as to defy the new governor. In 1659, feeling again the lure of the wilderness, he asked the governor, D'Argenson, for leave of absence to make another tour of the West. The governor refused, whereupon Groseilliers, as he may now be called, in great dudgeon clandestinely took his departure, accompanied by Radisson.

Their purpose, this time as before, was to visit their old friends the Hurons and Ottawa, but their destination was not Washington Island, for that island and the whole Door County peninsula now lay destitute of human beings. Another army of Iroquois, more numerous than the invaders of 1653, had in the intervening years driven its inhabitants into the wilderness. In his first narrative Radisson mentions a raiding party of Iroquois that was destroyed on

³³ Radisson, *Voyages*, 175.

³⁴ A specimen of Groseilliers' writing, showing his unfamiliarity with the spelling of his own name, is given in Brower, *Memoirs of Explorations*, 6: 74.

Washington Island with his assistance shortly after his arrival there in 1654. This, or possibly a similar affray a year or two later, had aroused the Iroquois to great fury, and in the fall of 1657 they sent out an army of twelve hundred warriors, armed with firearms, to annihilate these Indians of the West who twice had humbled them. Father Simon Le Moine, who had ventured among the Iroquois as a missionary, in a letter written in the fall of 1657, relates that a body of about twelve hundred men had set out "for the purpose of invading the country of the Outaouak and wreaking vengeance for the death of thirty of their own people, who were killed in war about a year ago, in those regions far distant from the Iroquois. Teharihoguen was General of that little army." Under date of March 25, 1658, Le Moine wrote:

Our poor Algonquins, both upper and lower, are to-day running the risk of total destruction, unless God interpose. For the Iroquois is playing his last stake, having left his country to go and exterminate them. A part of them have been in the field for two months, and are not expected to return until next Autumn. Their purpose is to sweep away the large Village of Hurons and Algonquins, whither the late Father Garreau was going, to plant a fine Mission.⁸⁵

As there were large numbers of Huron and Ottawa prisoners among the Iroquois, it is probable that some of these slaves found means to warn their tribesmen in the West of the impending attack, for when the Iroquois arrived in the Green Bay region they found the country deserted. In 1653 these and other fugitives had found a hospitable shelter among the Potawatomi in the village of Méchingan, where they had successfully repulsed the common enemy. But shortly after that glorious event, some friction had developed between the Hurons and their hosts. Radisson relates that after the skirmish with the Iroquois on Wash-

⁸⁵ *Jesuit Relations*, 44: 205, 219, 245. The proposed mission, named St. Michel by the missionaries, was in the Potawatomi village of Méchingan on the Door County peninsula. See Holand, in *Mid-America*, 16: 157-164.

ington Island the Hurons asked Groseilliers and Radisson to join them in an attack upon the Potawatomi. As inter-tribal warfare was not conducive to the fur trade, however, the two Frenchmen averted the attack and patched up a truce.³⁶ In view of these strained relations, a united stand in the village of Méchingan was perhaps impossible, and the Hurons and Ottawa fled to the Mississippi River. Nor could the Potawatomi remain to meet a new attack of the Iroquois, being too few in number. They, too, and other groups of fugitives fled in other directions, and for the next ten years the Green Bay region was deserted.

For these reasons the destination of the two Frenchmen in 1659 was not the Green Bay region, but Chequamegon Bay, near the present city of Ashland, where most of the fugitives of the Door County peninsula had reassembled. There were Potawatomi, Chippewa, Sauks, Ottawa, and perhaps other tribesmen; and about five days' journey to the southwest, at Lac Court Oreilles, were the Hurons. There Groseilliers and Radisson visited them. Shortly after their arrival there, a tremendous snowstorm prevented all hunting for several weeks. This caused a period of famine in which hundreds perished of starvation—a period described by Radisson in most harrowing details.³⁷

Toward the spring of 1660 the two travelers visited the Sioux, a few days' journey west of Lac Court Oreilles. The meeting place is supposed to have been at Knife Lake in Kanabec County, Minnesota, although the evidence as to the location is very meager. There the Frenchmen witnessed a festival for the dead, and, as there were numerous tribes present, including Crees from the north shore of Lake Superior, they found abundant opportunity for collecting furs. In the spring of 1660 they departed from Chequamegon Bay, as has already been mentioned, with

³⁶ Radisson, *Voyages*, 148.

³⁷ Radisson, *Voyages*, 202-206.

five hundred Indians and a vast freight of furs. Two hundred Indians, mostly Crees, soon lost courage for fear of the Iroquois, but the others made a safe journey to Montreal. Again the cannon boomed when all these riches appeared, and Groseilliers, no doubt, saw himself loaded with honors. If so, his joy was short-lived, for the governor soon appeared, caused Groseilliers to be thrown into jail for desertion, and confiscated most of the travelers' furs. Some commentators have expressed indignation over this "unjust treatment," but in reality the governor showed Groseilliers great consideration. As an officer who had deserted his post against the expressed prohibition of his superior, Groseilliers deserved to be shot; but in recognition of the commercial value of the clandestine venture, the governor reduced his penalty to a severe fine. Groseilliers went to France to plead his cause before the royal court, but his plea was, of course, in vain. In bitter resentment, the two adventurers thereupon went to England, where they were instrumental in organizing the Hudson's Bay Company, the greatest business enterprise of early American history.

The character of Radisson, the leader in these prolific events, was highly diversified, and it is difficult to determine whether to admire him for his merits or to abhor him for his defects. His most outstanding characteristic was his masterful way of meeting all sorts of people and situations. He was genial and unruffled in every emergency, ignoring threats and dangers, finding with unerring intuition the most direct way to the Indian's heart and his own profit. His lordly self-sufficiency won him the respect of all the Indian tribes, from the blood-thirsty Iroquois of the East to the remote Crees of Hudson Bay. Coupled with his recognized capability and courteous address, it made him a man to be reckoned with even by the courts of France and England.

To these qualities must be added his resourcefulness, bravery, and fortitude. He encountered innumerable dangers, but he merely mentions his narrow escapes with a pleasing modesty. When he was only sixteen years old, he was captured by the Iroquois and frightfully tortured at the stake; but such was his fortitude that he was adopted by a chief and became a great favorite with the whole village. Thirty years later he spent several winters on the frigid coast of Hudson Bay, but he never alludes to the cold and misery of that bleak region. Self-commiseration was apparently unknown to him, and his accounts of severe hardships are usually humorous.

On the other hand he shows himself to be as ruthless in shedding blood as the most abandoned Iroquois. After his adoption by them, he begs for an opportunity to show himself a true Iroquois. Daubed with war paint he goes off with a small raiding party and shoots harmless women working in the fields in the most approved Iroquois fashion. Proud of his misdeeds, he carries two bloody heads for hundreds of miles on his return to receive the praise of the village. This sort of life is so much to his liking that he refuses the offer of the Dutch officers of Fort Orange to rescue him.

It might be urged in extenuation of Radisson's depravity among the Iroquois that he was then only a boy; but this excuse will not apply to his behavior when, four years later, he again visited the Iroquois. At that time someone suggested the precarious plan of making a settlement among the Iroquois, and more than fifty Frenchmen, including Radisson as an interpreter, went to the Onondago in July, 1657. They built a strong fort to be prepared against all eventualities. In the fall, all the Iroquois warriors left on an expedition against the Indians of the Green Bay region, leaving only about a hundred old men with the women and children in the village. Nevertheless, the French feared

treachery and laid plans to depart secretly. When all preparations were made, they invited the hundred old Indians and their wives to a big feast and gorged them so abundantly with meat—and probably also brandy—that all the Indian guests fell asleep where they sat.

It was now proposed by someone among the French that they murder their guests. Although these Indians trusted Radisson as one of their own and had greatly befriended him, he finds nothing revolting in the suggestion to murder them, but on the contrary writes approvingly of it. He says:

Here we make a proposition, being three and fifty french in number, to make a slaughter wthout any difficulty, they [*the Indian guests*] being but a 100 beasts not able to budge, & as many women. That done, we could goe to their village att y^e break of y^e day, where we weare sure there weare not 20 men left. . . . It was no great matter to deale wth 5 or 600 women, & may be 1000 children.³⁸

But the French missionaries rejected the atrocious proposal, and departure was made without carnage, apparently to Radisson's disappointment. To him the Indians were merely vermin to be crushed under foot.

Radisson was preëminently a man without a country. Three times he changed his allegiance, not as a humble emigrant seeking a living, but as a public character to the injury of his temporary country. In 1665, to avenge a private grievance, he went to the English court and succeeded in treasonably inciting it to seize Hudson Bay, which was a part of the French dominion. In 1674, being dissatisfied with his share of the profits from the fur trade, he returned to the French service to assist in dispossessing the English of their established stations at Hudson Bay. In 1684, after discussing friendly plans with the French court for further enterprise, he secretly went to England and pledged his allegiance again. To prove his value to the

³⁸ Radisson, *Voyages*, 130.

English, he obtained a vessel and hurried over to the Nelson River, where he seized furs valued at \$35,000, which his nephew, as agent for France, had collected during the winter.

While the journeys of Radisson and Groseilliers were of great importance in the commercial development of America, the narratives that they have left are of little value in the study of the Indians. Radisson scorned the Indians, laughed at their beliefs, and only incidentally says anything about their mode of life, customs, character, or traditions. Yet so picturesque is his narrative and so suave is his personality that the reader is apt to overlook the hideous phases of his character.

One more characteristic must be mentioned, but its proper classification is doubtful. Radisson professed to be a religious man, and his writings contain many pious references. He begins his first narrative by dedicating it to "the glory of God," and he baptized many sickly Indian infants. He died in obscurity in about 1710 and was soon forgotten, while his manuscript narratives were consigned to the scrap heap. Fortunately they came to light again, and two hundred years later were printed by the Prince Society of Boston.

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EPHRAIM, WISCONSIN



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