

MR. RANDEL's interest in Edward Eggleston is reflected in a full-length biography and in several articles, including a review of his Minnesota fiction which appeared in the issue of this magazine for the spring of 1953.

# The KIT CARSON of the NORTHWEST

By EDWARD EGGLESTON

With an introduction by WILLIAM PEIRCE RANDEL

EARLY IN 1894 Edward Eggleston found in his mail the proofs of an article about George W. Northrup which Harper's had accepted and paid for in 1869. Its title was "The-Man-that-Draws-the-Handcart" — a reference to one of Northrup's many adventures. It is possible that the appearance in October, 1893, of Duffels, a collection of eleven stories covering Eggleston's career as a short story writer, reminded the Harper's editors of the unused manuscript. It needed some revision: "five years after his death," obviously had to be changed to "thirty years." But though Eggleston begrudged every distraction that delayed *The Beginners of a Nation* (1896), his first major contribution to American historiography, he welcomed the reminder of his most adventurous days and of Northrup, one of Minnesota's most colorful figures.

Eggleston's life was one of considerable variety and interest, but nothing in his later, successful years could compare for freshness and novelty with the events of his decade in Minnesota, from 1856 to 1866. In the process of sharing in Minnesota's heroic age he had found himself; but, in retrospect at least, the adventures had intrinsic value apart from their formative influence. This is surely true of his participation in the eclipse expedition of June, 1860, and the meeting with Northrup, described in the

article here reprinted from the issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine for February, 1894.

Eggleston wrote as if he had met Northrup often, but the only extant letter from Northrup indicates otherwise. On December 15, 1863, a news story in the *St. Paul Daily Press* reported that Northrup had stolen some arms and a horse the previous July, and then deserted from an expedition out of Fort Abercrombie. Eggleston quickly issued a correction, which appeared in the *Press* for December 19, pointing out that Northrup was scouting for the Union forces in the South at the time in question. Northrup's "thank-you" letter, dated from Huntsville, Alabama, on January 24, 1864, and now in the Collection of Regional History at Cornell University, supports Eggleston's opinion of the frontiersman's lofty character and literary bent.

"I am just returned from a scout into the mountains of North Carolina, and found enclosed in a letter addressed to me by one of the members of my Company, a slip from the *St. Paul Press*, headed 'Correction,' and to which your name is attached," writes Northrup. "Although several years have elapsed since we met on the banks of the Red River, and the sum of our acquaintance short at that, the 'correction' furnished me abundant evidence that the strong in-



GEORGE Northrup equipped for the trail

terest and kind regard which you evinced for an erratic hunter and trapper, has not been weakened by time."

For Eggleston's defense of his reputation, Northrup expresses special appreciation: "I have no claim upon your friendship, no act of mine has obligated you—yet have you kindly stepped forward to shield my name from reproach, from even a shade of imputation, and at a time when the misrepresentation, through the ignorance of my whereabouts . . . would have passed for truth." He then adds: "I feel that it would have been, indeed, unjust, when I had imperilled my life in the cause of my country, being more than one hundred miles within the enemy's lines, running every risk to procure information for our Generals, that at this particular moment I should be published as deserter from a Gold Hunting party on the plains of Dakota, and charged with stealing a horse."

After meeting Northrup on the voyage down the Red River in 1860, Eggleston for-

warded a report of his adventure to the *Daily Minnesotian* of St. Paul. It appeared in the issue of July 18, 1860, and there he gave his first fresh impressions of the "boyish looking man of twenty-three with soft beard, and flowing brown hair falling on his shoulders," who had already earned for himself the title of the "Kit Carson of the Northwest." Some years later, after Northrup's death, his friendly admirer assembled various stories of the young frontiersman's exploits, and the result was the article which follows.

#### THE-MAN-THAT-DRAW-S-THE-HAND-CART

I SING of arms and a man, for whether I consider him in his patient hardihood, his incredible physical endurance, his unsurpassed marksmanship, pedestrianism, woodcraft, prairie-craft, hunter-craft, and Indian-craft, or consider his ardor for his own intellectual culture in his hard surroundings, or recall his spotless moral purity in evil associations, and his admirable courage and chivalrous feeling, I am able to say, here was a man. And indeed it gives me pain now, nearly thirty years after his death, to think that I shall never see again my friend, nor ever, indeed, see any man his match or like again. For as there was but one Sir Galahad among the knights of Arthur's table, so was there among all frontiersmen but one George Northrup. . . .

The story I have to tell is not fictitious. I cannot hope that it is in all respects accurately correct, for some of the incidents have been collected and sifted with difficulty from the associates of Northrup; others, however, I had from his own lips, always loath to speak of himself and his achievements. I have attempted no embellishment, but have set down the facts as I understand them, from full accounts written out by me soon after his death, while yet all was fresh in my memory.

I had heard of Northrup before I saw him, for accounts of his daring exploits now

and then found their way into the St. Paul papers, and his expedition with a hand-cart had been matter of newspaper notice throughout the country. In the summer of 1860, while I was living in St. Paul, I joined a scientific party going to British America to observe a total eclipse [of the sun]. The leader of this party was at that time an obscure young man: none other than Professor Simon Newcomb, now of the Naval Observatory at Washington, and known as widely as astronomy itself. Mr. [William] Ferrel, the eminent mathematician, now deceased, was the assistant astronomer. Mr. Samuel Scudder, the now famous entomologist, was the young man who represented Professor [Louis] Agassiz and natural history.<sup>1</sup> After crossing some two hundred miles of what were at that time virgin prairies, from St. Cloud to Georgetown on the Red River of the North, we took the little pioneer steamer, then in its first or second season on that river.<sup>2</sup> Nothing could have been more awkward than that tub of a boat, plunging every now and again headlong into the banks despite the frantic exertions of the pilot, aided by the long steering-oar on the bow. We steamed some three hundred miles, according to the estimate of the boatmen, without seeing on the banks a human being or a house.

<sup>1</sup> Writing under the pseudonym "A. Rochester Fellow," Scudder published an account of the eclipse expedition entitled *The Winnipeg Country, or Roughing It with an Eclipse Party* (Boston, 1886). Like Eggleston he was deeply impressed by Northrup.

<sup>2</sup> The boat was the "Anson Northup," also known as the "Pioneer." In the winter of 1858, Anson Northup of St. Paul dismantled the steamboat, formerly used on the Mississippi, and hauled it from Crow Wing across country on sleds to the Red River. In the following spring it inaugurated steamboating on the Red River. See Captain Fred H. Bill, "Steamboating on the Red River of the North," in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 2:101-107 (January, 1928); Scudder, *The Winnipeg Country*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Painter, a former Mississippi River boat captain, commanded the "Anson Northup" during its second season on the Red River in 1860, according to Bill in the *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 2:107.

On the first morning of our voyage, while Mr. Scudder and myself stood on the boiler-deck of the boat in conversation, there came to us a young man with long brown hair falling to his shoulders. He was clad in a frontier coat made of a white blanket, and reaching to the knees, with bits of red flannel sewed on instead of the ornamental buttons that belong on the back of a coat. This young man held nominally the position of a watchman on the boat, but he was evidently much more than that, being Indian interpreter, ambassador, topographer, and guide through these strange waters.

"Are you gentlemen naturalists?" he asked.

Mr. Scudder answered in the affirmative, and the young man in the white blanket coat asked if we would like a Red River turtle. He went below and brought up a turtle, weighing about fifty pounds, which he said he had discovered in the water during the night by its audible breathing. He had harpooned it with the fireman's poker, a piece of iron ten feet in length. The blow had broken the dorsal plate, and the end of the iron had rested on the ventral plate. By bearing down on the poker while he walked round the gunwale and then walked the hawser to the bank, our new acquaintance had landed the che-lonian monster.

Mr. Scudder, with me for pupil-assistant, dissected the turtle, and I believe that his skeleton, with a skylight in the back, yet rests in the Cambridge Museum. Peace to his carapace! The prudent cook, having an eye, as Emerson would put it, to the culinary use of the world, sent a tin pan, into which we put the many-hued muscles as we stripped them off, so that we had both science and turtle stew out of him.

It was while we were eating turtle and potatoes at the breakfast table the next morning that Captain Sam Painter, commander of our petty steamboat, asked me if I knew the young man at the other end of the table, the captor of the turtle.<sup>3</sup>

"That," said he, "is Northrup."

"You don't mean to say," I answered, in surprise, "that that young fellow is the famous Northrup that we hear so much about—the one the Yanktons tried to kill last winter!"

"Yes," said the captain, with eagerness, "that is George W. Northrup, and he knows more about the frontier than all the rest of them put together."

I had supposed Northrup to be a man of forty-five or fifty, and it puzzled me for a long time to understand how so much of adventure could have been put into the life of a youth of twenty-three.

Having communicated my discovery to the rest of the party, we set ourselves to cultivate our new acquaintance, a task which we did not find easy on account of a sensitive and dignified reserve that always characterized him. He did not like to be lionized.

Our great surprise, next to his youth, was his diction. Not only that he did not swear nor use slang like other frontiersmen, but that he spoke in well-chosen words which had a certain aroma of books about them. He was not what we supposed a man of the wilderness ought to be.

His spare hours during this trip were spent in reading Blair's *Rhetoric*; he was acquainted with Bancroft, Irving, Prescott, Longfellow, and Cooper, but De Quincey was quite his favorite author. I found that he was crammed with the facts of history, ancient and mediaeval especially. He was the only man I ever knew who had triumphed over the formidable stupidity of [Charles] Rollin, having mastered all the facts, the date, place, commander, and number of men on each side, with the details and result of every battle, and all the other useless information that men used to call history. He had gathered about a hundred and fifty volumes, which he kept in a settler's cabin near Fort Abercrombie, at that time two hundred miles beyond the lines of settlement.<sup>4</sup> By his camp-fires he had been accustomed to fight over the world's battles in his imagination, until

those remote personages who seem like shadows to the rest of us were substantial people to him; he spoke of Gengis Khan in the same familiar way that we do of the Queen of the Sandwich Islands.

Averse to dependence on relatives, he had left his home in central New York on the death of his father. . . .

He was about fifteen years of age when [in 1853] he landed at St. Paul, then an Indian trading-post. He had a good education for his age, having even a considerable knowledge of Latin. He is described as a fine young fellow with long hair and kindly blue eyes, so pure in word and speech that some of the rude people about him thought him a girl in disguise.

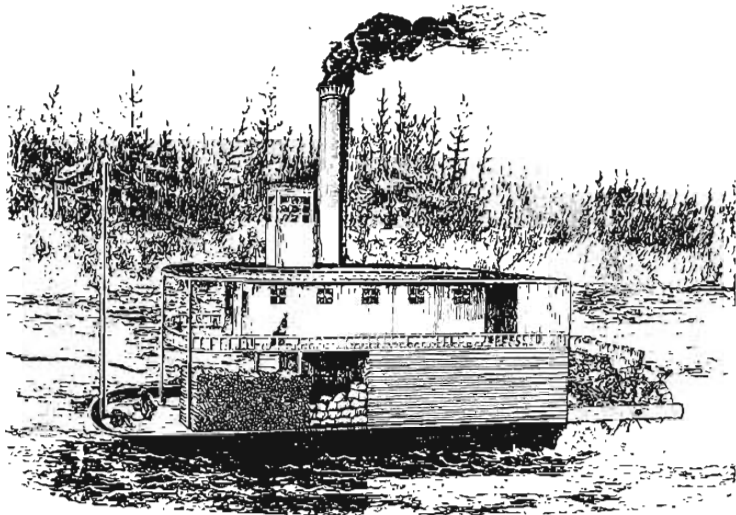
FROM the beginning George was always braving the lawless Yankton Sioux on their own ground, and most of his Indian encounters came from his adventuring beyond the line of traders' posts. As a boy he talked to his confidential friends about a project he had of passing from tribe to tribe until he should arrive at Bering Strait, and so pass over into Asia, and reach Eastern civilization by passing westward through the fiery belt of barbarism. No doubt many of his early aggressive explorations had to do with this project, which was identical with the dream that had driven the young Châteaubriand to America.

At a very early period of his life as a trader's clerk he took a wagon-load of goods and drove off into the Yankton country to trade, an enterprise from which almost any other man would have shrunk. After carrying on a traffic for a while, one of the Indians, appreciating the helpless condition of a white man surrounded by wild savages,

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<sup>4</sup>This military post, on the west bank of the Red River about thirty-five miles south of the present city of Fargo, was established in 1858 and abandoned in 1877. It played an important part in guarding the route from St. Paul to the western gold fields and, later, in opening the Dakota country to settlement. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-65*, 1:744-746 (St. Paul, 1891).

THE "Anson Northrup"  
as pictured  
in Scudder's book



stole a blanket from Northrup's wagon. Knowing instinctively that any weakness would insure his destruction, the boy trader pursued the savage and wrested the blanket from him. The audacity of the assault saved him; the Indians laughed and applauded, and he returned safely to the post. The Indian thief afterward attempted to take Northrup's life, and when finally prevailed upon to become reconciled, he said, pathetically, to Northrup, "I did not mind the blanket you took away, but you disgraced me in the presence of my people."

When George had spent three years on the frontier, being then eighteen years of age, and well acquainted with the Dakota tongue and the habits of the Indians, he probably thought it time to enter on his exploring expedition. At least he did then undertake to pass from St. Cloud, on the Mississippi, to Fort Benton, and so to the Pacific slope, by following the trail of Governor [Isaac I.] Stevens's party.<sup>5</sup> His outfit consisted of a handcart laden with the most

necessary articles, and his only companion was a faithful dog. The audacity of this attempt to pass alone through many hostile tribes and countless other perils besides is beyond the conception of those who know little of the Indians. But George loved to do impossible things, and so the foolhardy boy set out. He once pointed out to me a beautiful broad brook at a considerable distance west of St. Cloud. It was even then, in 1860, on the very verge of settlements. Here, George said, lived a solitary old man, the last man he saw before plunging into the wilderness. It was on the second day of his journey, and the old man begged him to desist from so rash an adventure, and entreated him to stop there with him. But nothing could turn the resolute fellow. From that hour he was thirty-six days without seeing human face or hearing any voice but his own. He told me that the agony of loneliness became horrible beyond description. The old dog often grew so lonesome that he would leave his station behind the cart and come round in front of Northrup, looking up wistfully into his eyes, begging him to speak. Nothing was so horrible to George as his own voice, but the persistency of the dog would carry the day, and when his master had spoken, the faithful rear-guard would resume his station.

In a maddening monotony of loneliness the river system of the Red River of the North was passed, and George, with awful

<sup>5</sup> In 1853 Stevens surveyed a route for a Pacific railroad leading from St. Paul to Puget Sound. Upon reaching the latter place, he became governor of the newly organized Washington Territory. See his *Narrative and Final Report of Explorations for a Route for a Pacific Railroad* published as 36 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 56 (serial 1054). Northrup made the trip here described in 1855, according to his own letters. See Gertrude W. Ackermann, "George Northrup, Frontier Scout," in *Minnesota History*, 19:382 (December, 1938).

pluck, was traversing the barren Coteau du Missouri. Here he was no longer able to trace Governor Stevens's trail, and he found himself surrounded by the most appalling dangers. To meet the Sioux of the plains on their own ground, in their most peaceful moments, was a peril to daunt the stoutest heart. But, reading the prairies as he did a book, George found everywhere the trail of war parties. The Yanktons, Yanktonnais, and Tetons, vile diabolonians all of them, seem to have been scouring the Coteau in hope of slaughtering some Cree or Assiniboin hunting party that had come down after buffaloes. To fall in with one of these fierce war parties was inevitable death.

To cap the climax, Northrup awoke one morning to find that the contents of his handcart had disappeared. Whether wolf or Indian were the depredator he did not know, but now that his outfit was gone there only remained one chance for life. By one of those incredibly long marches for which he was so famous he must put himself out of the reach of the human wild beasts whose fresh tracks were all about him. So he turned toward the nearest trading-post — at Big Stone Lake.<sup>6</sup> For the last four days he subsisted on raw frogs.

Accounts of this expedition appeared in the *New York Tribune* and the newspapers generally, but Northrup could not bear to talk about it.<sup>7</sup> The Indians seem to have been much impressed by the handcart attempt, for they immediately dubbed Northrup "Chan-pa-hmi-hma Yusdo-ha," or "The-Man-that-draws-the-Handcart," which remained his Dakota name to the day of his death.

HIS next expedition was hardly less adventurous. He joined himself to a band of Assiniboin Indians. During this summer George carried with him a small telescope, with the magical powers of which the savages were highly amused; and they soon learned to put it to practical use in detecting the Sioux scouts who were wont to lurk about the outskirts of the Assiniboin camp

in hope of cutting off some stragglers, or attacking some feeble detachment. By means of the telescope the whole wide prairie was scanned, and many a poor Sioux was detected and destroyed when he vainly thought himself out of sight.

One day an Indian was discovered, two or three miles away, on his knees in the grass making many curious and inexplicable motions. A detachment was immediately sent out by the Assiniboins to surprise and capture him, but when the frightened fellow was brought into camp he proved to be, not a Sioux, but an envoy from the friendly Chippewas, who, being something of a dandy, had stopped to make his toilet and paint his face before a pewter-cased pocket-mirror, preparatory to his advent among the belles and beaux of the Assiniboin camp.

Never satisfied with ordinary activity or common adventures, George was accustomed to employ green trappers to work by the month under his direction, then pushing beyond the usual line of trapping into the Yankton country, he would establish a camp out of the way of Indian haunts, and distribute his men up and down the streams to trap. During the winter of 1858-9 he planted his camp on Devil's Lake, a large body of water in what is now northeastern Dakota.

A Sioux chief of the Yankton tribe, whose Indian name signifies "old man," heard that the adventurous handcart-drawer was trapping at that point, and fitted out an expedition for the purpose of robbing him, partly perhaps under pretext of vindicating a Yankton claim to a riparian ownership in all the musk-rat and otter that paddled in

<sup>6</sup>The trading post Northrup reached probably was on the present site of Brown's Valley between Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse. A post was maintained there as early as 1819. See Grace Lee Nute, "Hudson's Bay Company Posts in the Minnesota Country," in *Minnesota History*, 22:272, 282 (September, 1941). For a view of the country through which Northrup traveled, see the cover.

<sup>7</sup>*New York Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1855. This article is reprinted in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 4, 1894.

the streams of that country, but influenced still more strongly by an Indian's love of plunder.

It was a bright winter morning, and George had followed an elk six miles through the snow. He had just shot it, and was stripping off its coat, when he saw an Indian scalp-lock rising above the top of a little knoll. He threw himself into a thicket, put his hand on his bullet pouch, and found by touch, without counting, that there were fifteen bullets in it, while thirteen Indians soon came into sight. Every bullet must bring a man, he said to himself, when the desperateness of his situation flashed upon him.

"Is The-Man-that-draws-the-Handcart here?" asked one of the Indians, for they knew Northrup's aim too well to approach without caution.

"If any man comes one step nearer," cried George, in the Dakota tongue, "until I know whether this is a war party or not, I will shoot him."

One of the Indians fired off both barrels of his gun into the air, which was a pledge of peaceful intentions, but it put George under the necessity of emptying his gun and trusting to the uncertainties of Indian good faith, or of accepting battle with the odds of thirteen to one. Slipping the cap from one barrel, George ran out and fired one barrel of his gun, bringing the hammer down on the capless tube of the other, as though that barrel were empty. He was now virtually a prisoner, but he dexterously replaced the other cap and kept a good hold on his gun. He afterward managed to load the empty barrel without attracting attention.

He understood perfectly the Indian plan. They knew that any attempt to take the life of a man with so sure an eye and quick a hand as George's would probably cost some Indian his life. They meant to detain him on some pretext while a detachment should plunder his camp, guarded only by inexperienced men. Northrup knew that he would lose not only the result of his winter's

work, but the provisions on which life depended, if the Indians should reach the camp ahead of him.

The boldest way was the only one. After standing in the Indian camp awhile he confronted the chief and said, quietly, "I'm going home," immediately turning about and taking the trail that led to his camp. The savages were nonplussed by the suddenness of the movement, and they fell into line behind Northrup. At every step of that six miles George expected a rifle ball from behind.

Guns, provisions, furs, were scattered about the trappers' camp in confusion; if the Indians on their arrival should find things so, the camp would be utterly stripped. George tried again what virtue there might be in impudence. Turning to the old chief, when they came in sight of the camp, he said:

"Old-Man, my men are green; they do not know that you are coming in friendship; if you go in now, they might fire on you. Wait here until I go and tell them that you are friends."

In fact, George feared nothing so little as that his men would shoot. But the Indians were deceived, and with a "Ho!" of approval, the Sioux consented to remain until their welcome should be assured. When they reached the camp, George had everything in order, the things all under guard, and the Indians saw themselves outwitted.

There were thirteen savages to six or seven white men; but Indians like to keep their own skins whole, and to attack so vigilant a man as Northrup was dangerous. George overheard them disputing which should have his rifle. "The one that gets you must be quicker than I am," he said to his gun, and his watchfulness foiled every attempt to surprise him.

"Where is your gun?" he demanded of one of his men.

"The Indians are sitting on it and I cannot get it."

George walked up to the row of Indians who had taken the gun in this tentative

and diplomatic manner, and eying them sternly, he seized the stock of the gun, whereupon the cowed savages rose up, and he returned the gun to the man and ordered him to hold on to it.

The crisis came at last. There was of flour but thirty-seven pounds in the camp, carefully hoarded against extremity. To George's consternation he found that Old-Man had seized it, while his frightened men did not dare offer resistance. Northrup walked directly up to the place where the chief sat with the sack of flour by his side, and laying hold of it, started off.

"Stop!" cried the Indian, getting to his feet. "Man-that-draws-the-Handcart, bring back my flour!"

George turned about, and with a gesture of that cool dramatic kind which so impresses a savage, he opened the breast of his coat and said, "Old-Man, if you want to kill me, shoot, but you shall not take away my food and leave me to starve."

"Then," said the chief, fiercely, "Man-that-draws-the-Handcart, you shall go south."

The Dakota tribes believe that the soul, driven out of the body, journeys off to the south, and "to go south" is, among the Sioux, the favorite euphemism for death. George looked unflinchingly at the chief and said: "Very well, Old-Man, I will go south, then. But if I go south you have got to go also, and just as many more as I can take with me. But you first."

At this the chief quailed. He saw that he was hostage for the good behavior of his whole party, and, indeed, Northrup had given orders that if a movement toward an attack were made by any Indian, the chief should be killed first. The Indians at last succeeded in stealing an old flintlock musket and a bag of pemmican, with which they made off. As soon as they were gone, George pushed off to a grove far out on the open prairie, which grove he had reason to think the Indians were not acquainted with.

Among the Yanktons George had a friend, an influential man. While Northrup was a trader's clerk at Big Stone Lake, this Indian had taken a fancy to him. After inquiring of the traders whether George was a likely man or not, and whether his habits were steady, he proposed to George a marriage with one of his three daughters. In vain George pleaded that he was too young; the Indian did not know why the handcart man should not have an Indian wife like the other traders. So importunate was this father of a family that Northrup could escape only by an evasive promise to consider the matter when he got to be older. And though the Indian's hopes of a son-in-law were doomed to perpetual disappointment, he never lost his friendship for the handcart man. When the latter would sometimes visit the Yankton village his friend made a feast for him of boiled dog-meat



*AN early  
Minnesota  
stagecoach*

and birds' eggs well on toward hatching. George ate heartily for his friend's sake, though he confessed to me that dog-meat had "a domestic flavor he could never quite relish." As for the eggs, he got on well enough except now and then when there was an appearance of feathers, in which case he would pass the egg to his friend.

Now when Old-Man was forming his party to attack the trappers, George's friend exerted himself vainly to prevent it. Old-Man's party came back, according to the Indian custom, and sat down without giving any account of their success or failure. You will find a description of such a return in "Hiawatha." There were the gun and the pemmican, which were enough to excite the worst fears of Northrup's friend, who quickly gathered a few followers and started off in search of George. Finding that the trail of the party went out toward the open prairie, as he supposed, and knowing that the open prairie in the winter was death, he concluded that George had become confused and gone out into the prairie to die. He reported this to the traders, who understood it to be a diplomatic way of intimating that Old-Man had massacred the party. Whereupon the newspapers gave accounts of his murder, told the story of his daring life, repeated once more the history of the handcart expedition, and moralized on the untimely loss of so noble a young man on account of his own foolhardy bravery.<sup>8</sup> But the young man and his companions returned in the spring with their peltries.

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<sup>8</sup>The St. Paul *Pioneer and Democrat* carried such a story on April 28, 1858.

<sup>9</sup>Blakeley describes the opening of this stage route from St. Cloud to Fort Abercrombie and identifies the English baronet as Sir Francis Sykes and the two sisters as Ellenora and Christina Sterling in an article on "Opening of the Red River of the North" in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8:50-53 (St. Paul, 1898).

<sup>10</sup>Goose Rapids were twenty-five miles below Georgetown, twenty-two miles long, full of boulders, and impassible in low water, according to Bill, in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 2:204 (April, 1928).

SOON after this the stage line was opened through from St. Paul to the Red River of the North, upon which river our droll little pioneer steamboat was launched to make the connection through to Selkirk Settlement, now Manitoba. Northrup mapped the route for this line. The first coach that felt its way over this unknown road was accompanied by Captain [Russell] Blakeley, one of the owners, and by Northrup as guide. Among the passengers were an English baronet and his friends going out to enjoy that manly pastime so much effected then by English and American gentlemen, the shooting of a few harmless buffalo cows, that they might have whereof to boast in the clubs. Besides these there were two Scotch ladies, sisters; one betrothed to an officer of the Hudson Bay Company, and had journeyed across an ocean and a continent that she might meet her lover in the Selkirk Settlement, whence after their marriage they expected to return to his post in the arctic zone. This devoted sweetheart and her devoted sister, who came as companion, awakened great interest in all who saw them.<sup>9</sup> Northrup, always full of a poetic and knightly sentiment, was ready to be their humble servant.

When the stage reached Georgetown the little steamer which should have taken the passengers to the Selkirk Settlement was immovably fixed on Goose Rapids, thirty-five miles away as the crow flies.<sup>10</sup> Sir Francis [Sykes], the baronet, proposed to depart immediately for the buffalo grounds without making the detour to the Selkirk Settlement, and he offered Northrup large wages to move off at once with him. But what was to become of the forlorn ladies? To go back three hundred miles would have been bitter; to stay where they were was impossible. Northrup spurned every offer of the gentlemen hunters, and resolved to see the ladies safe at their destination. There was nothing left for the baronet and his friends but to go with them. A flat-boat was built and put under Northrup's command, and the members of

this party were the first white persons to trace the sinuosities of the Red River.

George went to the plains with the English party in a subordinate capacity, but his manifest superiority carried him to the top, and he came back as chief guide. The baronet gave him a pair of ponies and a hunting-coat on parting with him, and sent him from London a fine wire-barrel rifle made to order at a cost of seventy-five pounds. In showing me this gun, George said: "She hasn't got a speck of silver about her, but I love her. She always goes where I tell her to." A year or two later another party came from England with an open letter of directions from Sir Francis, in which he said, "After passing St. Paul, trust George W. Northrup and go no further."

One Sunday some settlers on the upper Red River were chasing a bear which had ventured too near to the site of a hypothetical city, which city contained at that time but one lonesome log cabin. The bear was fleeing toward a wooded ravine, chased and worried by dogs. Once in the brush the pursuers would have to give it up. But now a second danger appeared in the shape of what seemed to be a party of mounted Indians, who would not hesitate to kill the bear and keep it. One of this party left the rest and came galloping toward the hunters. It proved to be Northrup, returning with the party of Sir Francis. He kept his eye on the retreating bear, never giving the hunters on foot so much as a look of recognition as he galloped past them, whipping his pony to the top of his speed. But the bear made the timber, and was to all appearances lost. Northrup did not abate his speed, but rode full tilt at the ravine, leaped off the pony, and disappeared in the brush. Coming out in a minute, he remounted and rode furiously up the ravine for half a mile, reined up, sprang off, and rushed into the brush again. In less than a minute his rifle cracked, and the bear was dead.

The next day Sir Francis wished to see a trial of skill in marksmanship. He got together the dozen or fifteen men — French-

men, Scotchmen, half-breeds, and what-nots — that were about the Hudson Bay Company's forwarding station at Georgetown, and bade them shoot, he supplying the ammunition. At one hundred paces there were many fine shots made; at two hundred there were but two or three good ones; at three hundred the shooting became wild. There was, however, one little Irishman who could put a bullet into a three-inch target twice out of three times at this range. Up to this time George had refused to shoot, fearing to excite jealousy; but now Sir Francis commanded him to take part. Northrup stipulated for his own gun; then he cut a hole in the bark of the tree, inserted a half-dollar piece, turned about, and stepped off five hundred paces.

"Now, boys," he said, "If I shouldn't happen to spoil that, the one who gets it may have it!"

But his bullet cut the coin. I have the incident from a trustworthy land-surveyor who participated in the match, and in the foot-race for the half-dollar. It tallies with all that one hears of his shooting. Captain [E. Y.] Shelley of Brackett's Battalion of cavalry told me that he had often seen Northrup shoot small birds for fish-bait, but that he always did it by shooting off the bird's head with a revolver.

The ponies given him by Sir Francis were stolen by the Chippewas. I have heard that Northrup recaptured one of them, riding through a village of Indians with two loaded and cocked revolvers in his hands. The Chippewas called him "White Cloud," from a white hat that he wore on his first appearance among them.

THE WINTER after my acquaintance with George began he was engaged in the arduous task of carrying the mail from Fort Abercrombie to Pembina, two hundred miles land journey over a country without a habitation. The journey was made with a dog-sledge and a half-breed assistant. Exposure in winter on the prairies of the Red River Valley is something that the hardest



FROM HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE, AUGUST, 1860

THE cantonment at Fort Abercrombie from which Northrup carried mail to Pembina

man might shrink from. The thermometer often touches forty and sometimes even reaches fifty below zero at the northern end of this journey, and the storms of snow and wind are very perilous. In the mail-carrying he was probably always near enough to the streams to find a shelter in the timber or in a ravine during a storm; but in journeys over the open prairie, Northrup, like other *voyageurs*, had sometimes to lie down in the snow, with the sledge-dogs close against his body, and keep still under a blanket of snow for twenty-four or forty-eight hours until the wind should abate. No living thing can travel and survive in one of these blizzards, as we now call them. I speak of these *de profundis*, out of my own memory of them. . . .<sup>11</sup>

LIKE many other men who have gone to the frontier in their boyhood, George

<sup>11</sup>The section here omitted describes Northrup's adventures in the summer of 1861 while guiding a party of Englishmen on a hunting expedition. They were attacked by a band of Teton Sioux from west of the Missouri, and later robbed of their provisions by some Yanktons, but Northrup led them back to the Red River and safety.

Northrup chafed with regret that he "had thrown his life away," as he put it. But he declared that the force of habit was so strong now that he could not change. Seeing no other way for him, I suggested that he devote his life to zoology. He was the keenest and most intelligent observer of the habits of animals that I have ever known. Professor Agassiz, on Mr. Scudder's suggestion, offered him an engagement to collect for the Cambridge Museum. But at the outbreak of the war he was seized with a patriotic enthusiasm, and he wrote to the great naturalist almost in these words, "While the war lasts I belong to my country; when the war is over I am at your service." He looked forward with much hope to the prospect of a life of scientific work, and I make no doubt that had he lived he would have ranked at least as high as Audubon. I have seen him go down upon his knees in the grass, and by careful examination tell whether it was a fox or a wolf that had lain in a "nest," by the position in which the feet had been placed. Where the ground was beaten under a wild plum-tree he examined the confused tracks

critically, tracing them with his fingers, and told me that an old doe elk and her fawn had stood in that place all the day before fighting flies. He was regarded as almost infallible in these matters.

Northrup became orderly sergeant of Company C in Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota cavalry, which for a time was part of the Fifth Iowa cavalry in the Army of the Cumberland.<sup>12</sup>

Always respecting a manly enemy, Northrup had a chivalrous hatred of a skulking one. Jerry Stone, a noted Tennessee bushwhacker, had killed in cold blood an unarmed old man in the neighborhood of Fort Donelson.<sup>13</sup> George vowed to kill him at the first chance. One day as he was in command of an advance-guard he received an order to fall back. But just as his men were mounting, Stone's bushwhackers fired upon them. George ordered a charge, and himself selected the leader, and gave chase. As Stone's horse was the fleetest, Northrup used his revolver first, saving the carbine for close encounter. Jerry Stone fired three times without hitting his pursuer; George shot five balls from his revolver, with one ball wounding Stone's horse, and shooting three through the man. He said afterward that he ought to have killed him, but he could not slay any helpless enemy. It is said that Jerry languished a year in the hospital, and then recovered, and escaped by violating his parole.

George's value as a scout was soon discovered, and he was ordered to report for that service to General [George] Crook, and was, indeed, several times consulted by Major-General [George Henry] Thomas, and sent out under his directions from his headquarters.<sup>14</sup> Once with nine men he penetrated a hundred miles into the Confederate lines, combining forces with the loyalists of the mountains of North Carolina. These illiterate and independent mountaineers, like many other highlanders, lead semi-independent lives, and are loath to acknowledge governmental restraint. During the days of the Confederacy they

called themselves Union men, now they are "moonshiners." They do not "lift cattle," like the Scotch Highlander of the last century; they only make illicit whiskey and shoot revenue officers. Among these men of the hills, who carried flintlock muskets, Northrup camped. Under their guidance he surrounded the house of a savage provost marshal, a Colonel Walker of Texas, who had offered \$10,000 in any kind of money for Northrup's party, "dead or alive." They undertook to capture him, but Walker resisted and was killed. Then Northrup hurried back into the mountains, and escaped between two divisions of the Confederate army into the Union lines at Chattanooga. For his conduct in this dangerous expedition he received high commendation at headquarters.

IT WAS soon after this, while he was on furlough, that I, with others, endeavored to get a commission for him. The Governor offered him a paltry second lieutenant's commission in a new regiment of infantry, but Northrup wrote, after a day or two of consideration: "I am a cavalryman by nature. My place is in the saddle. I cannot recruit. I would rather go back and fight it out with my company." Brackett's Battalion was ordered to the frontier in 1864

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<sup>12</sup> What was known as Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota Cavalry was organized with four Minnesota companies in January, 1864, under the command of Major Alfred B. Brackett. From 1861 to 1864 these units had belonged to various other regiments. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:573.

<sup>13</sup> Fort Donelson, on the Cumberland River commanding the approaches to Nashville, figured in three battles in which Brackett's Battalion took part on February 8 and August 25, 1862, and February 5, 1863. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:573, 576, 577.

<sup>14</sup> General Thomas assumed command of the Army of the Cumberland, which included Northrup's unit, in October, 1863. Long service on the Northwest frontier doubtless gave General Crook an appreciation of the value of the services a scout could render. He commanded a cavalry division in the Army of the Cumberland in 1863. *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:579; *Dictionary of American Biography*, 4:563.

to aid in suppressing the Sioux, who had risen against the whites in 1862, and against whom an ineffectual expedition had been sent in 1863.

During the march across the plains George acted as correspondent of the *St. Paul Press* newspaper, and, as I remember them, his letters were written in English of great purity and vigor, and the accounts of the march were enlivened by Indian legends and incidents of adventure suggested by the camping-places.<sup>15</sup> He had always a notion that he should lose his life in a charge, and when the battle of Tah-pah-o-ku-tah drew on he gave several little articles to another correspondent, saying, "Send these home, and write my obituary when I am dead." Perhaps it was only his old deep-seated melancholy. But the Indians in front were his old foes, the Yanktons and Tetons, to whom he was well known, and he had good reason to fear that they would seek to put out of the way one who understood their country so well.

Once in the battle, he dashed out far in

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<sup>15</sup> Northrup's reports on the expedition's progress, signed "Icimani," appear in the *St. Paul Press* for May 11, 29, June 2, 7, July 17, and August 6, 1864. Reports of the battle in which Northrup died, written by other correspondents, appear on September 6 and 7, 1864.

<sup>16</sup> Brevet Brigadier General Minor T. Thomas enlisted in 1861 as a member of Company B of the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. During the winter of 1862-63 he was in command of Fort Ripley, and in 1864 he commanded a brigade in the Sully expedition against the rebellious Sioux. See *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:713.

<sup>17</sup> Northrup is mentioned from time to time in the *Minnesota Historical Collections* and in scrap-books of clippings kept over a period of many years by the society's library. It was not until long after Eggleston wrote, however, in 1933 and 1934, that Northrup's grandniece, Mrs. Theresa MacEwan of Lafayette, New York, presented to the society some of his letters and other items reminiscent of his adventurous career. The letters are quoted extensively in Miss Ackermann's article in *Minnesota History*, 19:377-392, and a daguerreotype that accompanied the collection is reproduced on page 270. A saddle bag used by Northrup on the Sioux expedition of 1864, his bayonet, and some Indian items he collected are in the society's museum.

front of his company, and began to say something to the Indians in their own language. Did he court death, and was he upbraiding them for their cruelties? Or did he hope to secure a parley and so to make peace? No one knows what he said; but the Sioux recognized him, and determined to slay the handcart man. The wild Indians of the plains who had no guns shot at him with arrows. George had a sixteen-shooter, and Brigadier-General Miner [*sic*] Thomas told me that he saw three Indians fall under his rapid fire.<sup>16</sup> I doubt not that every shot took effect. But at last, pierced by three arrows, Northrup fell dead. The Indians tried to secure the body, that they might mutilate it according to their custom, but Major Brackett ordered a corporal to recover it "if it costs the life of every man in your squad."

They buried him, and trod the ground down with their horses' feet that the enemy might not discover his grave. Many of the soldiers of the battalion were accustomed long afterward to carry his photograph with them, and the corporal who recovered the body showed me a soiled picture that he had carried in his breast pocket for a long time. I have seen hardened and weather-worn frontiersmen who could not speak of him without tears.

THUS lived, and thus died at the too early age of twenty-seven, George W. Northrup. No braver, truer, purer, kindlier, or more modest young man ever lived. While he lived he was widely famous on the frontier, and since he died the Minnesota Historical Society has shown some interest in the facts of his life.<sup>17</sup> But no county in that State bears his name, no island in his own Red River of the North is his monument, no village or township commemorates him. Small politicians, Indian chiefs, old French explorers, have borne off the honors. This man Northrup, the most romantic figure in the early history of Minnesota, has nothing but that nameless grave beyond the Missouri and swift forgetfulness for his meed.



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