



AH-MEEK THE BEAVER

Souvenir of
A CENTURY OF PROGRESS
1933

*"In the stream he saw a Beaver,
Saw Ah-Meek, the King of Beavers."*

—Longfellow's Hiawatha.



THE Beaverhead River pitches down from the Great Divide back of the Yellowstone country in Montana. Fed by the everlasting snows, it tumbles down from the loftiest heights of the Great Rockies and starts them on a long journey through the Missouri, the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico, to swell the volume of the Atlantic Ocean.

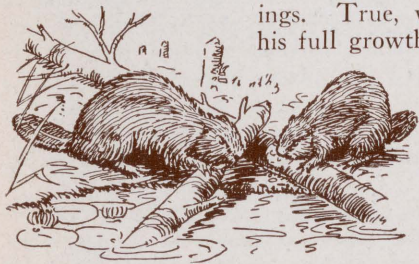
Ah-Meek (the Beaver) who with his mate had stolen away from their old home on the Missouri travelling up this winding stream for many miles, past pitching rapids and falls so high and wide that detours were sometimes necessary, until they finally came to a flat, open, meadow-like place, where the mountains were farther apart than usual. The banks here were bold but the stream was not so rapid. The water was clear as crystal and the flat thickly grown with aspen and poplar, the principal food of the Beaver.

With a smack of his broad, shovel-like tail, Ah-Meek climbed the bank, and selecting a tree about six inches in diameter, he quickly had great chips flying. In an incredibly short space of time, the tree had been felled so that it lay directly across the stream.

Another smack on the water close by, announced to Ah-Meek that his mate had overtaken him, she having stopped to lunch on the bark of an aspen, lower down. Immediately the two of them attacked the fallen tree, and limbs and twigs were lopped off and curiously anchored at one side of the stream.

Tree after tree was felled; smaller ones for binders and larger ones, up to a foot or more in diameter, for weight and resistance to the heavy water pressure which the dam would be called upon to withstand. Rocks, gravel, sand and mud were most ingeniously used in the structure and in a few weeks the dam was erected to a height assuring a back water from five to ten feet in depth, immediately in front of the dam, and flooding the flat for quite a distance back from the original course of the stream.

The dam provided a wonderful swimming hole for their pleasure, especially as one bank was quite high. On this one Ah-Meek soon had a slide, down which he and Ah-Meek-Tah would skid and dive into the pond with great tail slappings by which they signalled each other their pleasure, warnings and advices. But the dam was not built entirely for fun. The first consideration in Ah-Meek's mind was safety. Nature having endowed him with scant physical means of protection against the predatory denizens of the forest, had however given him intelligence and skill to compensate for these shortcomings. True, when Ah-Meek would gain his full growth and strength, his powerful



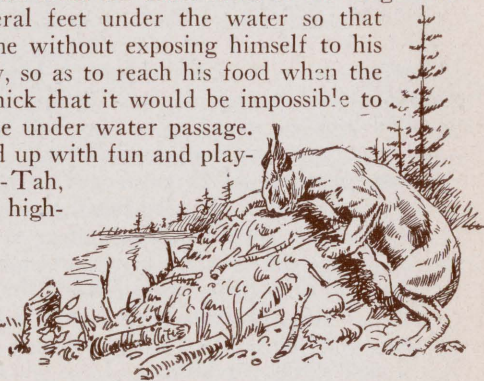
teeth, capable of felling large trees, and his broad tail, were weapons to be reckoned with, but his short legs and heavy body made him very awkward and slow on land. So Ah-Meek built his dam and backed up the water for a secure retreat from wolves, lynx, bear and others who were especially fond of Beaver meat. It was also his store room, for Ah-Meek knew that when the Frost King came and sealed up the stream, and drove the sap from his favorite trees, and brought the deep snows through which he could make no progress, that he must have a store of food or there would be hard times for Ah-Meek and his family.

In a curious way, not known to men, Ah-Meek could take the limbs and logs of trees and anchor them on the bottom of his pond, so a great pile of twigs and limbs was cut and floated to the deepest spot in the pond, and there anchored for winter use, the bark of aspen, poplar and willow being his chief food with an occasional feast on lilly roots.

The dam being finished, the winter supply of food stored away, Ah-Meek and Ah-Meek-Tah, who had until now lived in a burrow tunneled in the bank, began to build a house on the bank of the stream. First trees were cut and laid out so that several comfortable sized rooms were left and these were made large enough for the accommodation of Ah-Meek's expectations. Smaller limbs and twigs were laid upon and closely entwined with each other until a strong frame work was ready to receive the coating of mud which sealed the top of his lodge completely, except for a small breathing hole at the apex. The final coat of mud was not placed until just before the first hard freeze, Ah-Meek knowing that unless the mud froze into an impenetrable roof to his house, the wolf and other hunters of the forest would soon rip up his home and make an end of him and his mate.

Ah-Meek dug a tunnel from the main room of his lodge down through the bank several feet under the water so that he could reach his home without exposing himself to his enemies, but principally, so as to reach his food when the ice should become so thick that it would be impossible to come to it except by the under water passage.

After a summer filled up with fun and playing with Ah-Meek-Tah, sensibly combined with highly intensified, useful work, with a good dam to hold his playground and store room, with a warm, comfortable lodge and





plenty of food in the store room, Ah-Meek and Ah-Meek-Tah passed a wonderful winter. It is true that many times wolves howled about the lodge and sniffed at the warm pungent smell that came through the vent at the top and scratched at the roof trying to break through, but Ah-Meek had built well and the hard frozen mud made his work like stone. Once however, he had really been frightened when a big lynx had come and pawed and scratched for a whole day and had jumped up and down on the roof and screeched so fiercely in his rage that poor little Ah-Meek-Tah was nearly scared out of her wits, especially as three little Ah-Meeks had just come to the lodge a few days before, but the lynx, after breaking a claw, and trying to bite his way in, concluded that reinforced concrete was too strong for him and went away seeking a meal on some less intelligent dweller of the mountains.

After several years had passed Ah-Meek's family had grown until there were at least a dozen Beaver in the settlement. The house had been enlarged. The dam had been built higher. The harvesting of the aspen, poplar and willow had gone on to such an extent, that Ah-Meek must go further afield for his food supply. So he called his tribe together and with many curious given instructions they started a system of canals about two feet deep and three feet wide, back into the forest. These were completed and by August they were floating the winter supply through the canals to the storage points. Some of their canals later were extended up to six hundred yards or more.

For many years Ah-Meek and his kind had built dams that withstood the highest floods and heaviest ice-packs, dams wonder-

fully contrived with the convexity to face the pressure of the stream. These unequalled structures held the water back in the mountains and prevented floods. They caught the silt from the mountains and formed the pleasant meadows in the high Sierras. More, they helped protect the broad valleys of the Missouri and Mississippi from floods, by holding back a considerable portion of the melting snows.

It was an appalling thought now to think that all accomplished by this skill, energy and perseverance was to be threatened by a new danger all because of a fine lady's desire to be adorned in the handsomest fur known, Beaver! and the dandies of the town must have their hats made of the finest Beaver fur.

The Hudson Bay Co. was formed in London that milord and milady might have fine hats and coats. Traders were sent out to induce the Indians to trap the beaver, and for a few beads, cloth and trinkets, the most intelligent habitant of the deep forest was slaughtered. There was no money used. A trapper would come to the trader and so many pounds of powder, so many pounds of lead, so many pounds of salt, cloth, etc., were traded for so many beaver pelts. Beaver pelts were for many, many years the only medium of exchange or money.

Formerly the Indians would kill only such Beaver as they needed for clothing or food, but when the white man came they killed more for trading. The white man came with his traps and his guns, and his fire water, for the latter of which the Indian required many Beaver skins to pay for his needs, and soon the Beaver of the Great Lake Country were so reduced it hardly paid to trap for them.

Other fur traders starting from St. Louis, learning that beyond the broad prairies there were Great Mountains, and from these came the most wonderful fur, pushed on and came at last to The Beaverhead, where Ah-Meek had built his lodge. One of these came upon a great dam upon which grew Birch and Cedar trees, so widely spread and so solidly built it seemed almost unthinkable that it could be aught but a natural formation. There was no thought in this trapper's mind that Ah-Meek's work was the saving of many an acre of broad Missouri bottoms or that the water, stored in his reservoir in the spring, seeped through and watered the arid Montana plains in the heat of the rainless summers. All he cared or thought of was for the immediate present. Many Beaver skins meant a warm reception and plenty of rum and women waiting his return to the frontiers of civilization.

Planting his traps with cunning, he reaped a harvest such as man had never boasted of. He was, however, not quite satisfied as he had not been able to catch two enormous Beaver, one of whom seemed chief of the whole clan, and who had been able so far to evade his most cunningly placed traps, but, who even though the trapper had practically caught all of his family, seemed loathe to leave the home of his youthful endeavor.



It was growing late and the October chill of the mountains warned the trapper to hurry away. He had decided to pull his traps in one more day, hoping at the last to catch the prize of the river, before leaving. Coming to a displaced trap on the dam (generally traps for Beaver were placed under water near the tunnels where if caught the Beaver soon drown) he noticed a considerable amount of grass and earth had been disturbed, but no Beaver was there. On examination, a foot in the trap told

of a struggle and a sacrifice made for liberty and life; a brave little worker lamed forever.

The trapper stayed around a few days longer, but saw no sign of Beaver, heard no flopping of signals on the water, for Ah-Meek and Ah-Meek-Tah had gone, probably to found another colony and build up another family, which in its turn might fall prey to man's greed and another's vanity.

The trapper and many others of his kind, suffering untold hardships of weather, fatigue and hunger, carried their loot back, to be shipped away to Europe, to be made into hats and coats for Mi-lady and Mi-lord. The traffic was tremendous, the cry for more Beaver insistent. The fortunes of the Hudson Bay Co., the Astor family and many others not so prominent, were built up by the almost total destruction of a little animal, whose cunning could build a dam unequalled by man; who built houses with rooms and supports for the roof to withstand the cold and the attacks of the strongest wolf, lynx or bear; who stored up his surplus against the time of need; who built canals to raft his food from distances; a strong, self-reliant, pleasure-loving, intelligent, industrious engineer of the wild places.



Following the trail of the Beaver, pushing their way through trackless forests, over and past almost insurmountable mountains, through desert and canyon, across rushing and powerful rivers, the fur traders reached the Pacific; the search for Ah-Meek had opened a continent. The little engineer paid dearly for his warm, thick, handsome fur. The country below paid dearly. The waters of the high peaks have no little worker to build strong dams to hold them back and slow up the spring flood and dole them out to the parched land in summer. The almost total extinction of the Beaver and the ravages of the lumberman on the

mountain slopes, is felt by the farmer from Idaho, Montana and Colorado to the distant flats of Louisiana.

Many Beaver skins have been converted into sky-scraping buildings and the fortunes made then are still intact. But his name, his habits and his history will always remain interesting to those who think and read of the early days of our country, so intimately was he connected with our earlier development in furnishing the prize which urged the hardy pioneers to push their discoveries further into the heart of the continent, till the Oregon Trail was blazed for us all to follow.

Greatly impressed by the wonderful intelligence and constructive industry of the Beaver as exemplified in the many dams and canals built by them which I have seen in my wanderings in the woods and mountains, I adopted the Beaver as our trade-mark and drew the picture we use from a memory I had of a Beaver colony with its dam and canal system, which I saw on the Ontonagan river in Northern Michigan.

W. CARY LEWIS.



Afterword

IN issuing this little story of the Beaver, our objective was to call your attention to our reason for adopting the name of this little animal as our trade-mark, for we have endeavored to use the same kind of constructive ability in building up our business.

Our experience tells us that by having the largest variety of the best material, we can meet any condition of quality, office practice or price. Our service in the selection, packing and delivery of material is given particular attention. Our organization is composed of men of wide experience and good judgment, and from the results obtained we are sure we have built "a strong dam against a flood of competition."

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is an assurance that if there was anything better we would have it.

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