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# The Crimson Wigwam

By THEODORE ROBERTS,

Author of "The Red Feathers," "Captain Love," "Heming, the Adventurer," "Mary Jane," etc.

Written specially for this edition.

WESTWARD and westward, beyond the voiceless barrens, beyond the hills where dwell the Gray Hunters, beyond the narrow sea and atop the edge of the world, glows the Crimson Wigwam. The spirits of the warriors of the Beothic People tarry at the Crimson Wigwam on their way out from the stony graves, to tell their names, and the tales of their great and little deeds, to the god who dwells therein. Then they continue on the long trail to the valleys of eternal summer.

In the Crimson Wigwam are many wonderful things which in the old days were given to man by the gods, only to be taken back because of the waywardness of man. Among these wonders are: The Red Arrow, The Wallet of Plenty, The Moccasins of the Wind, The Pictures of Wisdom and The Water of Healing.

To the village on the River of Three Fires stole a fearful sickness. It followed on the trail of the hunters who had been slaying the caribou about Wind Lake. The season was that of the southward migration, when the great herds cross the barrens to the extremest valleys, and the ptarmigan cross the bays and dust themselves in the dry loam between the granite boulders on the knolls; when the snipe take wing for the far flight and the leaves singe to blackness on the twisted alders. It was the season of dropping gold in the birch thickets; of rotting berries on the marshes; of haze of lost camp fires across expectant lakes.

Before the dawn, with the white frost, the sickness stole into the lodges of the village. Three of the returned hunters were the first to die. Then a woman turned away from her food, and her eyes from the light, and forgot the voice of her lover. The old women distilled bright liquors from various herbs, according to their knowledge of such things. The priests covered their heads with the head-skins of bear and wolf, and invoked their gods. They pricked their flesh with needles of bone, moistened the ashes of the council-fire with their blood and tossed pellets of it to the four ways. Still the sickness entered the lodges and claimed its helpless victims.

With the coming of the snow and the binding of the ice, the nameless malady increased in deadliness. Then the oldest man of the village—oldest in wisdom as well as in years—called Wolf Master, his great-grandson, to his lodge and told him of the Water of Healing, which was in the Crimson Wigwam atop the western edge of the world.

"Hold straight to the journey," said the oldest man. "Turn not aside for anything save food to strengthen you on the way. Cross the salt water as your wis and courage may tell you how. At the door of the great lodge of dyed skins stand upright and cry, with a fearless voice, that death sits in the lodges of your village and that you have journeyed from the River of Three Fires, without help of magic, in quest of the Water of Healing. Then cover your eyes with your left hand and extend your right, and await what may happen."

Wolf Master tied food in a bag at his belt, armed himself and bound racquets to his feet. His heart shook within him for terror of that journey which no living man before him had undertaken. As he turned his face westward from the shelter of the lodges, a young squaw ran to his side and laid slim hands on his arm. The bloom of health was still in her cheeks and lips. Life still glowed undaunted in her strong young body. Her eyes were alight with more than life.

"Do you hunt to-day?" she asked.

He freed his arm from her hands and drew her against him.

"I hunt a great quarry," he said; and he told her, in a few words, of the Water of Healing.

"Let me go with you," she pleaded, clinging to the furs on his breast.

"Nay," he whispered, "for how could I remember the sufferings of the village and the end of the quest, with your hunger and weariness ever near me? Then would I forsake the trail, that I might hunt food for you and build you a warm lodge."

The maiden saw the truth of his words. For a moment she clung to him—and then turned away. So they parted at the edge of the forest, where the new snow lay gray and unbroken under the gray sky. The girl went back to the stricken lodges, and the brave stepped between the frozen spruces and broke his trail up the wooded slope.

To the west he set his face, flashing through the lifeless wood up to the lifeless barren. A long wind ran before him, between the levels of brooding sky and blanketed earth. He died in a thicket of black spruces, like a wounded animal in its den. The gray canopy of heaven hung lower and snow descended in silent, revolving curtains of white. Wolf Master bent his head to it and held on his way; and love was a fire in his heart that warmed his courage against the ghostly desolation. All day he travelled, breaking a trail that twisted and turned, yet held true to the westward course. So the expert woodsman has ever travelled—saving his strength by edging thickets rather than breaking through, and taking a dozen steps around wind-fall and boulder rather than risking a strain by leaping across.

The storm of snow ceased about noon. The sky cleared, and a cold draught of wind came down from the north. When the early twilight began to gather over the gray waste, Wolf Master sought a resting place in the heart of a thicket of firs. There, with one of his racquets, he dug a trench in the drift. Near by he found fresh tracks of a hare, and above it, between two small spruces, he set a loop of fine thong. Returning to the trench, he built a fire and broiled a fragment of dried deer meat. He wisely chose to make his first day's journey short, so as to season himself gradually to the toil that lay before him. At one end of the trench he laid a bed of fir branches, springy and aromatic. At the other, the fire burned brightly, and the white, melting walls reflected the heat to the couch of boughs.

In the middle night Wolf Master awoke. The fire was low. Stars twinkled frostily in the violet dome of the sky. A light wind ran in the huddled firs and blew an occasional wisp of snow across the trench. Wolf Master fed the fire with a few sticks from the pile of dry wood which he had gathered before retiring. As the flame shot up, two great wolves slunk away from the edge of the trench into the shadows of the trees.

By the red sunrise Wolf Master found that his snare had been robbed. There was blood on the snow. Under the thin, new drift he discerned the tracks of wolves. Anger stirred in him, and a hot desire to hunt down the robbers; but duty held him to the westward trail.

Night after night he set his nooses, at the end of each weary journey, and night after night, the same pair of wolves, following like grim shadows, devoured his catch. At last all of his dried deer meat was eaten and hunger gnawed him. The narrow, unknown sea still lay a day's march ahead. Death faced him, and trotted behind him in the open. Better to seek it while his blood had still some warmth from the last scanty meal than to wait for it to tear him at the last with double agony. So, that night he built no fire and set no snare.

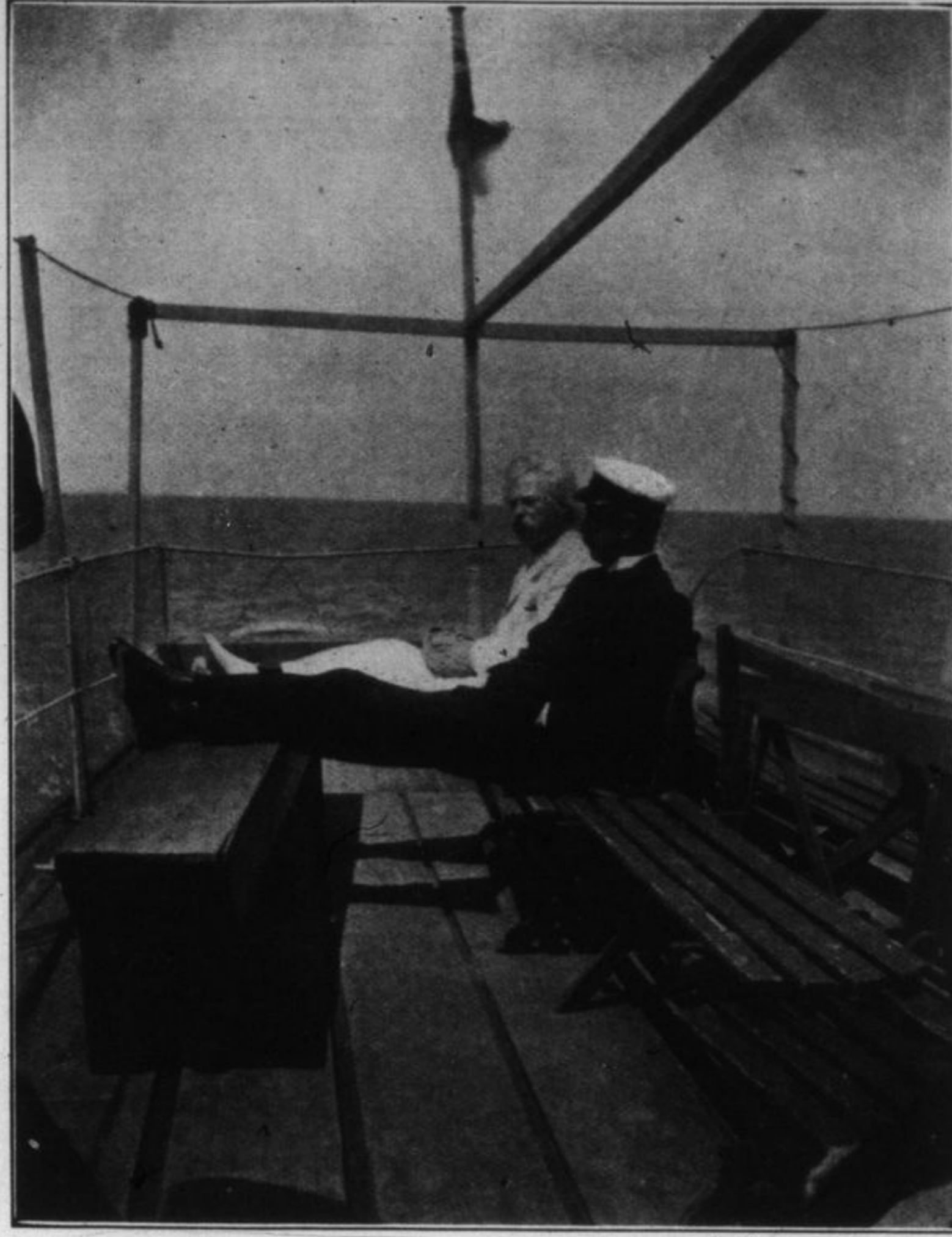
Twice, in quick succession, Wolf Master drew his bow and sped the heavy arrow. The dog-wolf snarled and sprang. The she-wolf yelped and crawled forward with her belly in the snow. The flat knife struck the dog-wolf in the shoulder, and tore hide and muscle. Again it struck, this time wedging between two of the gaunt ribs. Then the hands of the man closed on the neck of the beast. The final struggle was brief.

A day's journey back from the western coast lay the great red carcasses. Wolf Master had taken the pelts from them, and a little of the flesh. The red foxes found them and fed to their content. Jays and snow-birds pecked at the frozen bones.

Wolf Master stood on the shore of the narrow sea, gazing westward and across. He could not see the Crimson Wigwam for the sun was still low in the east. Ice fringed the gray tide, and the rocks were drifted with snow. The farther shore lay like drifted smoke along the uneasy waters. The air was bitterly cold; and in all that wide outlook nothing stirred, but the wind and the sea. The warrior's courage faltered and sickened. Who was he to dare those unknown perils?—to brave the sliding, shifting waters on which no man had ventured before him?—to stand at the door of a god's lodge? His spirit covered within him; his limbs shook; his belly yearned for food.

Strengthened by the meat of a great sea-bird, which he had stalked and killed, Wolf Master took fresh heart for the completion of the adventure. By the slanting sun of the previous evening he had seen the walls of the Crimson Wigwam so close that it seemed as if an arrow, shot high, would rouse the god from his retreat. Now only the rocking sea and the belt of smoky hill lay between him and the guardian of the magic water.

With fire and his stone axe, he felled a dozen spruce trees. He trimmed them of their branches and dragged them to the edge of the tide. There he bound them together with thongs cut from the raw hides of the wolves. He shaped rough paddles of spruce and fir. Such game as he could procure—a brace of ptarmigan, several gulls and a hare—he roasted at his fire, let freeze and bound securely to his raft.



THE VICE-REGAL VISIT TO BERMUDA  
Earl Grey and Mark Twain en route to tropical reefs, which form part of the Bermudian archipelago.

The morning sky was heavy, the wind was raw and from the east, when he launched his rude float from the rocks onto the desolate waters. The raft rode so deep that it was awash with every wave. It was sluggish, too, and the reckless voyager had to work desperately, with his pole of spruce, to get it clear of the shore. Once away from the rocks the wind helped him. He paddled until he was tired, standing upright, with the icy water streaming over his moccasin feet. He found it no easy matter to keep his balance, so sidling and erratic was the action of the sea.

The wind from the east drove a white fog before it. It blew out like dropping smoke. The rugged coast of the great island, the unstable floor of the sea, and the unknown coast ahead, were all blotted from Wolf Master's vision. Unseen birds, with harsh, affrighting voices, cried around him. Toil-spent, chilled to the bone and sickened by the unfamiliar motion, he lay prone on the raft and clung to the straining thongs of hide by which it was held together. Indifferent to danger, and weak beyond naming, he sank, at last, into a profound slumber.

The sleep of exhaustion lasted many hours. The wind slackened and fell. The fog thinned and rolled southward. The sea quieted. The sun shone in the west, illuminating the walls of the Crimson Wigwam till they burned like fire. Soon the dusk flooded from the east and stars glinted overhead. Weird voices floated on the bitter air—the voices of the spirits of the wilderness. In the north a red curtain fell across the stars, shook east and west with silver and violet in its folds, and wavered along the hill tops. The gods of the north were dancing, beyond their walls of eternal ice.

Wolf Master's sleep of exhaustion slowly deepened towards the verge of the sleep of death. The while his blood pulsed slower and slower, he dreamed of summer and love. His leather garments were frozen stiff, and the raft was heavy with a casing of new ice. And still he slumbered, dreaming of summer along the valley of the River of Three Fires. Shortly before dawn a nothing and landward current drew the raft toward the shore of the unknown land. Sea-birds swooped above it, veering and returning. A bright figure waded into the water and lifted the body of the brave from the sodden raft. The face of the god was tender. The arms of the god were strong and warm.

When Wolf Master recovered consciousness he found himself lying on a caribou hide in the open. The blood ran warm in his veins. Weariness had left him. He was clothed in a new coat made from the skins of silver foxes. Gloves of mink skin were on his hands, and on his feet were moccasins trimmed with dyed porcupine quills. Beside him, in a bag of oil-skin, lay what he knew to be the Water of Healing. He sat up and looked about him. In front ran the narrow sea, gray as steel under the high sun. Beyond it lay the rugged shores of the great island from which he had come. But nowhere could he see the Crimson Wigwam.

He fastened the bag of water to his belt and got to his feet. A strange sensation of buoyancy—of strength and lightness—possessed him. He sprang into the air and felt the invisible currents firm under his feet. Then he knew



THE LATE DR. DRUMMOND IN HIS STUDY  
This picture shows the author of "The Habitant" seated at the desk on which were penned many of the charming poems dealing with French-Canadian life that have made the name of Drummond a literary asset to Canada.

that he wore the Magic Moccasins of the Wind. So he ran eastward, swift as flying brant, high across the gray sea, the black hills and the white, desolate barrens.

In the chief's lodge in the village on the River of Three Fires, sorrow crouched in the shadows. The daughter of the chief lay unconscious, stricken with the sickness. From the outer glare came Wolf Master, her lover, with the Water of Healing in his hands. Kneeling beside the couch of skins, he held it to her lips. Straightway she opened her eyes—and life was returned to them, and love still glowed in their depths.

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