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SKETCH

OF THE

NORTH-WEST OF AMERICA.

BY MGR. TACHÉ,

BISHOP OF ST. BONIFACE,

1868.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH, BY CAPTAIN D. R. CAMERON,
ROYAL ARTILLERY.

—♦♦♦—
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at them, I found grains of barley, peelings and chips of potatoes, and rubbish, including even fish bones. To account for this curious collection, it must be told that to fish and potatoes, making our ordinary meal, we had added, on the previous day, the luxury of barley broth. Our proficiency as housemaids did not go so far as to remove all traces of the cooking that was done in the same room, for we had but one. It will be understood, then, how fish, barley and potatoes made their appearance in the rubbish placed by the mouse, during the night, in the mocassin. In the course of one night these little quadrupeds will remove a bulk larger than themselves, and as they do not use travelling bags, and as there is not always much that they can pilfer, it may be concluded that several of them unite their efforts to work for one store. They are a regular plague. Here at Red River, they are so numerous that they injure the standing crops, as well as consume and steal the grain after it has been gathered in. This thieving disposition was of unexpected service to us this year, however. The grasshoppers exhausted our supply of a pea that we were cultivating with success; we put the last of it in the ground in spring; the grasshoppers ate it, and it was thought there was no more to be had in the country; but at St. Norbert, where for several years it had been found impossible to cultivate this kind of pea, there was found a considerable supply concealed by mice on the shelves of an old altar that had been left over the vault of the church.

The Labrador jumping mouse (*Meriones Labradorius*) also frequents the Northern Department as far as Great Slave Lake. Here, as elsewhere, this little rodent is remarkable for the extreme length of its hind legs, and the still more exaggerated length of its tail, which exceeds the head and body together. This rat is from four to five inches long, and jumps with surprising agility and quickness. The long tail, generally pliant, is stiffened at length when the animal is jumping, and then the hair on it gives it a curious appearance.

The Northern Department also furnishes five species of marmots enumerated below:

The Weenusk or Quebec Marmot—*Arctomys Empetru*.

The Whistler—*Arctomys Pruinosus*.

Parry's Marmot—*Arctomys Sperophilus Parryi*.

The Tawny Marmot—*Arctomys Sperophilus Richardsonii*.

Franklin's Marmot—*Arctomys Sperophilus Franklini*.

The Leopard—*Arctomys Sperophilus Hoodii*.

The Quebec marmot measures from ten to twenty inches, and is found throughout the eastern portion of the Department, and also in the Rocky Mountains : the western districts are probably without it. The fur, without being of remarkable quality, is yet an article of commerce. The number killed amounts to only a few hundreds, which proves that the fur is neither valuable nor much sought after.

The mountain marmot, the Canadian Whistler, is found in this country only in the Rocky Mountains. It lives in the slopes of sandhills, in which it burrows. It forages in autumn, as well for food, as to furnish its dwelling.

The fur of the Whistler, although of little importance in commerce, is in much request, in its native country, for its warm and lasting qualities. Several skins sewn together make a robe with which one may face cold, and that lasts for years.

The remaining four species of marmots that are to be found here, are in no way interesting, unless by breaking the monotony of our great solitudes.

These quadrupeds are like squirrels, but without their agility. All of them live in holes, whence they come out from either choice or necessity, and to which they fly on the least sign of danger.

The flesh of the Tawny is very palatable. Indians and *voyageurs* feed on it willingly, particularly when large game fails them.

The genus *Sciurus* is represented here by only three species :

The Hackee—*Sciurus (Tamias) Lysteri*.

The Four-banded Pouched Squirrel—*Sciurus (Tamias) Quad-rivittatus*.

The Chickaree—*Sciurus Hudsonius*.

The first two species do not exceed five or six inches in length. They climb trees with great facility, are full of life and spirits during summer, but during winter never leave their retreat.

The Chickaree is larger than the other two species, measuring from eight to nine inches. Its color is greyish brown ; it makes its nest in the bottom of the largest trees, arranging several passages by which to leave its dwelling to enjoy its frolics on the branches.

Besides these, we have two varieties of flying squirrels. The smaller one, *Pteromys Sabrinus*, is met with in the south-eastern part of the Department, and the other, *Pteromys Sabrinus Alpina*,