THE DREAM OF HUDSON BAY

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of mind are what count, the dream of
fulfillment is always within reach.
The longing for Hudson Bay is behind me,
but the grandest dream of all,
entering the vast world of
comprehension and knowledge, is still alive.

When I was young, I had a dream of someday seeing Hudson Bay. I was a guide then, learning the intricate waterways of the Quetico-Superior country, and I used to listen to some of the older men tell about their exploits in the vast waters of the North. Invariably, in talking about the Albany, the Severn, or the Gods River, they would say, "I went to the Bay." The Bay meant only one place, Hudson Bay, and I vowed someday I'd go there. Those stories of great wild rivers and chains of beautiful lakes seemed almost unreal to me, but my visions of them haunted me until at last I made it, traversing the wide reaches of Lake Winnipeg, the Nelson, and the Echimamish then down the historic and turbulent Hayes, with its rapids and icy windblown lakes, to the broad flat marshes that mark its end.

It is impossible to describe the feeling that was mine on coming out of the wilderness into the open space of the Bay. We sat in our canoes for a long time just looking at the open sea. The Bay was the only thought in my mind. No one spoke as we felt the first tidal swells; we had made it in spite of everything and my dream had been fulfilled. Strangely enough there was a certain emptiness within me, and it was a long time before its full significance dawned. In a sense I matured during that moment of realization. Now I was an old-timer and could say "I've been to the Bay."

Someone said, "Do not take from any man his dream"; when a dream is gone, hope is gone, and life can become drab and without purpose. As long as a dream is ahead, there is always something to look forward to. No doubt that was the reason for the letdown when we came to the sea, but it was not long before I knew it was only the beginning of another dream: to see the Far North rivers of the Canadian shield. Eventually I did this, and found each realization was but an open door to another adventure. I remember so well the first time I saw the famed Athabasca after coming down the Fond du lac from Reindeer and Wollaston, the Athabasca I had read about in the journals of the fur trade, a three-hundred-mile sweep to Fort Chipewyan at its far western end, the place from which the Athabasca brigades came when heading for the Churchill and Grand Portage Post.

Nor will I forget my first sight of the enormous reaches of Great Slave Lake with its countless islands, the gateway to the Coppermine River, the Thelon, and Great Bear Lake farther north; of the Great Bear River with its ninety-mile plunge to join the Mackenzie, the enormous waterway to the Arctic Sea, which the explorer Sir Alexander Mackenzie had thought was the way to the Northwest Passage and the Orient.

Those dreams are over now and I can sit in my cabin and remember as voyageurs always do, envision the entire continent, which was once open to challenge and exploration. I know a man is never so much himself as when he is actually part of a dream, never so lost as when it disappears and there is nothing to look forward to.

Every so often, communal groups attempt to find their dream in cooperative and unselfish living, with personal gain or aggrandizement sublimated to the goal of mutual need. Thoreau, Emerson, and Hawthorne were among the first, and there were countless others, but usually after a time their dreams disappeared in disillusionment. Today we have many communal groups who see such attempts as an escape from a world of strife and inequity. Many of the young have abandoned our present way of life, gone into unsettled regions of the land to build rough little cabins and live in close communion with nature and the out-of-doors.

The anachronism of this syndrome is that the majority are still dependent on the largess of parents or of those who have spent their lifetime accumulating the wherewithal to help them get started. If they are sincere in their effort to find peace in simple living, they should do as their forebears did, wrest a livelihood from the soil without help from anyone. Then and only then would they realize their dream to the fullest.

We ask, "What is the answer? How can a dream be realized, any dream?" Perhaps the answer is if a dream is seen as a perfectly created material state, it is inevitably doomed to failure. Only when it is a striving toward an attainable goal can it be achieved. In short, what is attainable is spiritual fulfillment and growth, the kind of maturing that sees and knows all, a state of being where one is in tune with ancient rhythms that give meaning to life. One can strive toward such a goal, but it takes work and patience and many

years of effort. Seldom does it come to its entirety, but even so there is the deep joy of knowing one has arrived by his own efforts.

If spiritual growth and maturing of the mind are what count, the dream of fulfillment is always within reach. My dreams, like those of most people, have gone through many stages; the first was concerned mostly with physical satisfactions, finding an environment that satisfies the most simple desires—to me, vistas of beauty and meaning, the chance of knowing the great silences, and a sense of oneness with all living things. But once this is accomplished comes the search for the ultimate, which only knowledge of the earth, the universe, and man's relationship to it can bring.

This is a lifetime search and can best be begun by reading and studying the thoughts of men who since the earliest times have pondered the same identical questions. It is well to know great minds have struggled as you have to find meaning in their lives, encouraging that the vast majority reached almost identical conclusions, that only through knowledge and knowing themselves could they arrive at the answers.

The second step is the discovery of the secrets that have eluded men since the earliest days. Today, with our almost infinite understanding of nature, the whole world lies before us; but our inventive genius, while it has resulted in a multiplicity of great discoveries, is still only on the verge of knowing.

The third step is that one must realize he is not alone: most of the world is seeking peace and fulfillment, the dream going on everywhere as it always will. Each individual will interpret it in his own way and continue to strive. My own particular one goes on and on, and if I can arrive at even a glimmering of meaning and understanding of what life is all about, I shall be happy. To achieve my dream completely may

be impossible; I may have to be content knowing there is some logic and reason behind the framework of the universe.

When I sit in my cabin watching the flames in my fireplace, it reminds me of countless fires I have built all over the North—but even more, I remember that mankind has gazed into fires and dreamed his dreams for centuries. The longing for Hudson Bay is behind me, and that for all other explorations I have been on, but the great dream, that of finally growing into the vast world of comprehension and knowing, is still very much alive. This is the grandest dream of all.

At last I am beginning to believe I am part of all this life and to know how I evolved from the primal dust to a creature capable of seeing beauty. This is compensation enough. No one can ever take this dream away; it will be with me until the day I have seen my last sunset, and listened for a final time to the wind whispering through the pines.

PART TWO

Search for Meaning

The greatest achievement of our flight to the moon is the picture of the earth, a living blue-green planet whirling in the dark endless void of space, and the realization that this is home.

HARMONY

Harmony is the musical
flow of environmental awareness
and evolutional knowledge
through the mind of man.

Harmony of knowledge, will, and feeling toward the earth is wisdom; for it has to do with living at peace with other forms of life. At one time man lived in harmony like all other creatures, and during most of his long existence this had been his way of life, but today it is no longer true. Since the beginning of civilization, harmony with nature has been almost disregarded, though it has been recognized by a few great minds as the only solution to the problem of finding peace and contentment. Man has devoted his intelligence and energy to conquering nature, subduing it, molding it to his will. He has in the last few decades changed the surface of the earth, crisscrossing it with a vast network of roads, excavations, and lines of communication. He has become a geological force, leveling mountains, pushing hills into valleys, swamps, and estuaries, polluting the earth, air, and water to the point it may soon become uninhabitable for him, as well as all other species.

He has exhausted the earth's resources, robbed both water

and soil of nutrients, exterminated many forms of wildlife, reached a point in his savage exploitation where he must assess what he has done.

In wilderness, harmony is the natural way of life as it has always been, but we must not destroy it by overcrowding or by any exploitative use that might change it. The most important function of the wilderness for modern man is the opportunity of glimpsing for a moment what harmony really means. Having sensed it, he can bring the vision back to our urban complexes, and the wisdom that enables us to understand what we have lost. It is wisdom we are striving for in our daily lives, wisdom that colors our attitudes not only toward cities with their clamor but toward all who live within them, nearby or far removed.

My camp is tucked into a cluster of spruces and pines, with its doorway looking down a great vista of island-dotted waterway. I have just started my evening fire and a thin plume of smoke rises to the sky. The canoe is snubbed to a tree, the packs under cover, and enough kindling tucked away for morning. A squirrel chatters at me from an overhead branch and whisky jacks are already drifting in for scraps of food. It is easy to think of harmony here. The soft musical, almost ventriloquial notes of the whisky jacks—their lack of fear brings me close to them.

I eat my meal to the singing of the birds back of the tent. This to me is balance and wisdom, and I know the whole world of nature is a matter of adjustment. Harmony, I realize, is impossible to define; it is presumptive and ridiculous to say, "I am in harmony at this particular moment." Harmony is an intuitive sense, an unexplainable thing, something that is part of you without your knowing how it came about.

There are catastrophic occurrences in nature, but in time such imbalances are corrected and harmony returns. Man in

his short time span, his inability to accept the long point of view, is impatient with the slowness of nature and doubtful of his world ever achieving balance. Why, he asks, do tornadoes level great stands of trees that took centuries to grow? Why do floods inundate the bottom lands of rivers, with great loss of life and destruction to countless homes, villages, and even cities? Why the ice ages that have come and gone for millions of years? Why earthquakes, wars, and disease? Why do the four horsemen of the apocalypse ride across a once peaceful earth? Why? Why? Why? Things such as these man cannot understand, for he has not the length of vision.

A year ago a sudden windstorm blew down a huge Norway pine behind my cabin. That tree had been a joy to me, but the wind came without warning, twisted it, and felled it so close to the end of the cabin that it grazed the corner and dropped its great weight next to the fireplace without harming a single other tree. When I saw it, I was shocked, knowing what could have happened, though I had been warned when a bolt of lightning hit its lofty top a couple of years ago and made a livid scar down its trunk to the ground. I knew then the tree was doomed.

I did not cut the splintered stub, but left some fifteen feet of it standing as a reminder of my good fortune. Out of the rest I made firewood, for much of it was already dead and dry. Now my woodshed has the finest kindling I could ask for and a pile of the branch ends to use in the fireplace when I want the smell of them.

I think of the spruce budworm, which has decimated millions of acres of balsam and spruce, of the cotton-boll weevil, of the blight that wiped out the great chestnut trees in the Eastern states, of the countless epidemics that have supposedly ruined forests all over the continent, and thinking about them I am sometimes sad, until I remind myself it is

part of the great cycle. Though it may seem out of harmony with nature's plan, it is only because of our limited perspective that we do not comprehend.

Last summer a party of young boys camped at the north end of Basswood Lake, their tents set up on the smooth duff under a stand of big red pine. During the night, a storm blew up and a bolt of lightning hit the top of one of the tallest trees, flashed down the trunk following the root over which one of the tents was pitched, instantly killed a boy lying close to it and shocked several others. Why did it have to happen? Where was the harmony there? It was a time of sadness for the boy's parents and for his companions, and again there was no explanation. All I could think of was the old Indian tradition of never camping under big trees. Centuries of experience had taught them why.

There is more to harmony than events such as these, for it involves man's attitude toward the earth. Instead of looking at it in the concept of the old Judeo-Christian philosophy of domination—ignoring the ancient ways of nature and molding it to our wishes—we must now look at the earth with recognition of our close relationship to all life.

Our ecological crisis is simply proof we as exploiters are now reaping the results of greed and thoughtlessness, that only when we know what is meant by an ecological conscience will we ever reverse our attitude and be able to meet the situation we have created.

Harmony is evident in countless ways. It is easy to see its working in the wilds, more difficult to understand in the cities, even though there we have before us the ultimate result of our activity. We speak blithely of conservation, the environmental movement, forgetting the basis of everything is harmony. It means many things, but foremost is the realization that this old earth is our home, the only one we will ever

have in spite of progress in exploring space. I often think the greatest achievement of our space effort is the picture of our beautiful blue-green planet whirling in space surrounded by an atmosphere that makes it habitable for man. More than anything coming out of these dramatic adventures, this view of the earth is the most important. For the first time man saw it with cosmic perception: this was the world he must cherish and preserve.

The astronauts who took the famous series of pictures talked about how they felt seeing all of the earth at one time, and how beautiful it was, how small and alone it appeared in the vast void of space. If all mankind could see what those men saw, the planet that had given man and all other creatures birth, if he could see at a glance the ugliness he was responsible for, if there were some way he could see the pollution of the oceans, rivers, and lakes, the swirling atmosphere around it, the mountains of garbage he has placed upon it—if this cosmic view could be extended to the point where he would realize his survival was at stake, he might be willing to do something about it.

But even though man knows, and scientists have told of the hazards we have raised, he goes his merry way, believing somehow the nightmare will go away and life continue as usual. The journeys to the moon, the explorations of Mercury and possibly other planets have demonstrated our power and ingenuity, and though there are many marvelous by-products from those efforts which add to our comfort and efficiency, unless we face reality soon, all such advances may be for naught.

Einstein's feeling for harmony puts all worries into perspective when he says: "The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. . . . His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural

law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that compared with it, all the systemic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work. . . . It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages."