



VOYAGEURS' CAMP.

The standard weight of each package used in the fur trade is one hundred pounds, each boat containing seventy-five "inland pieces," as such packages are called. In crossing a portage each voyageur is supposed equal to the task of carrying two inland pieces upon his back. A broad leather strap, called a "portage strap," is placed round the forehead, the ends of which strap, passing back over the shoulders, support the pieces, which, thus carried, lie along the spine from the small of the back to the crown of the head. The departure of these boat brigades on their long trips forms a very picturesque spectacle. The boats are decked in holiday attire: small red flags, streaming ensigns, gaudy ribbons, and the spreading antlers of moose and elk appear every where above the square packages of freight. Congregated upon the beach are the wives and sweethearts of the boatmen, who have come to bid them adieu.

The voyageurs of the Company are generally of French extraction, descendants of the trappers and traders of the old Northwest Company. Their grandfathers were French Canadians, their grandmothers Cree and Chippewa squaws. A merry, light-hearted race, they are recklessly generous, hospitable, and extravagant. In the summer they pull an oar in the boat brigades; in the winter they vary seasons of hunting with longer intervals of total idleness. Vanity is their besetting sin, and they will leave themselves and their families without the common necessaries of life to become the envied possessors of a handsome suit, a gun, or a train of dogs, which may happen to attract their fancy. Intensely superstitious, and firm believers in dreams, omens, and warnings, they are apt disciples of the Romish faith. Completely under the influence of the priests in most respects, and observing the outward forms of religion with great regularity, they are yet grossly immoral, often dishonest, and generally untrustworthy. But as hunters, guides, and voyageurs they are unequalled. Of more powerful build, as a rule, than the pure Indian, they are his equal in endurance and readiness of resource.