

by boiling it in a strong alkali which takes off the outer husk; it is then well washed, and carefully dried upon stages, when it is fit for use. One quart of this is boiled for two hours over a moderate fire, in a gallon of water; to which, when it has boiled a short time, are added two ounces of melted suet; this causes the corn to split, and in the time mentioned, makes a pretty thick pudding. If to this is added a little salt (but not before it is boiled, as it would interrupt the operation,) it makes an wholesome palatable food, and easy of digestion. This quantity is fully sufficient for a man's subsistence, during twenty-four hours; though it is not sufficiently heartening to sustain the strength necessary for a state of active labour." Such was the simple and frugal fare on which the Canadian voyageurs chiefly subsisted.

Leaving the "pork-eaters" to return to Montreal with the cargo of furs, we will follow the "northmen" into the interior country. The traffic from Fort William northward was carried on in a manner somewhat different from that hitherto described. The canoes brought from Montreal were too large to be navigated in the chain of small lakes and rivers which extend north-west of Lake Superior; and therefore others about half the size were procured from the natives, and navigated by four, five, or six men, according to the distance which they had to traverse. These small canoes carried, on an average, a lading of about thirty-five packages; of which about two-thirds contained goods to be bartered with the Indians for furs; and one-third contained provisions, stores, and baggage. In each of these canoes was a foreman and a steersman; the one to be always on the look-out, and to direct the passage of the canoe; the other to guide the helm. The foreman had the command of the canoe, and was obeyed in all his directions by the middlemen or rowers. Independent of these, a conductor or pilot was appointed to every five or six canoes, whom they were all obliged to obey, and who was paid liberally, as a person of superior experience. The canoes, thus equipped and manned, embarked on the north side of the Grand Portage, on the river Autour.

Before they were many miles distant from Fort William, the canoe-men had to commence a similar train of operations to those so often necessary near Montreal. At the Carreboef Portage, half of the lading of each canoe was taken on shore, and carried by half the crew; while the others rowed the canoe with the remainder of the cargo through a dangerous part of the river for a distance of four miles; then they landed the other half of the cargo, and returned to meet those who were toiling along the shore with the first-mentioned portion of the burden. These portages recur with very great frequency, and were surmounted by similar means, for a very long distance from Lake Superior.

When the canoes arrived at Rainy Lake, they met with one of the forts or factories of the company, at which was repeated, on a much smaller scale, the system of exchanges which had been pursued at Fort William. The canoe-men from Fort William brought to Rainy Lake a supply of goods and provisions for the winterers in the Athabasca country, situated much farther north. These latter could not reach so far as Fort William, and return to Athabasca before the winter set in; and therefore a party of the "pork-eaters" or "goers and comers" were detached from the Montreal party, and sent to meet the "northmen" at Rainy Lake. This being done, and the exchange of goods effected, the former returned to Fort William, and from thence to Montreal; while the latter pursued their way towards the north.

To such an immense distance inland did the agents of the North-West Company pursue their traffic, even so early as the year 1790, that the journey onward from Lake Rainy—itsself situated far beyond the remotest confines of Lake Superior—occupied the canoes a period of two months. Up to this point little was done but toiling up the rivers and lakes, contending with rapids and portages at distances of every few miles; but at Lake Athabasca, the traders divided into different parties, for carrying on a trade with the Indians. Some embarked on the Peace River, to trade with the Beaver and Rocky Mountain Indians; some proceeded to Slave Lake, almost in the frozen regions of the north; another party proceeded to the country surrounding the Elk River; while the remainder trafficked with the Indians near Lake Athabasca.

The mode in which the traders were accustomed to carry on their dealings with the Indians was nearly as follows. In the fall of the year the natives met the traders at the forts, where they bartered the furs or provisions which they

had procured. They then obtained credit for ammunition, traps, &c., and proceeded to hunt the beavers, and other animals; not returning again to the forts till the beginning of the following year. At this time they were again fitted out in a similar manner; and returned a second time with a cargo of furs, about the end of March or the beginning of April. The greater part of the hunters then returned to their country; and lived during the summer with their relations and friends in the enjoyment of that description of plenty which is derived from numerous herds of deer.

The persons who actually kill and capture the beavers are not all Indians. Some of them, under the title of *trappers*, have European blood in their veins, and form a class which is perhaps unique in North America. Mr. Washington Irving has described this class of men with great clearness: and although his narrative relates to a different part of the North American continent, and to another period than that which here occupies our attention, yet the details are so nearly applicable to every phase of the fur-hunting occupation, that we shall avail ourselves of the description in working out our object.

The trappers are generally Canadians by birth, and of French descent, who have been employed for a term of years by some fur-company; but their term being expired, continue to hunt and trap beavers on their own account, trading with the company in the same manner as the Indians. Those who trap in the employ of the company are called simply by the name of trappers; while those who thus work on their own account are distinguished by the appellation of *freemen*. Having passed their early youth in the wilderness, separated almost entirely from civilized man, and in frequent intercourse with the Indians, they lapse into the habitudes of savage life with great facility. Though no longer bound by engagements to continue in the interior, they have become so accustomed to the freedom of the forest and the prairie, that they look back with repugnance upon the restraints of civilization. Most of them intermarry with the natives, and like the latter have often a plurality of wives. During their wanderings in the wilderness they lead a precarious and unsettled existence, faring better or worse according to the vicissitudes of the seasons, the migrations of animals, and the plenty or scarcity of game. By exposure to sun and storm, and all kinds of hardships, they come gradually to resemble the Indians in complexion as well as in tastes and habits. From time to time they bring the peltries they have collected to the trading-houses of the company in whose employ they have been brought up; and traffic them away for such articles of merchandize or ammunition as they may stand in need of. At the time when Montreal was the great emporium of the fur-trader, one of these freemen of the wilderness would suddenly return, after an absence of many years, among his old friends and comrades. He would be greeted as one risen from the dead; and with the greater welcome as he returned possessed of much money. A short time, however, spent in revelry, would be sufficient to drain his purse, and sate him with civilized life; and he would return with new relish to the unshackled freedom of the forest. Numbers of men of this class were during the palmy days of the North-West Company, scattered throughout the wilds of America. Some of them retained a little of the thrift and forethought of the civilized man, and became wealthy among their improvident neighbours; their wealth being chiefly displayed in the possession of large bands of horses, which covered the prairies in the vicinity of their abodes. Most of these "freemen," however, were prone to assimilate to the Indians, in their regardlessness of the future.

A few words ought also to be said here respecting the Indian fur-hunters, who are, or were employed by the companies much in the same manner as the trappers. These hunters were generally some of the aborigines of Canada who had partially conformed to the habits of civilization, and the doctrines of Christianity, under the earlier colonists of that country. "These half-civilized Indians," says Mr. Irving, "retained some of the good, and many of the evil qualities of their original stock. They were first-rate hunters, and dexterous in the management of the canoe. They could undergo great privations, and were admirable for the service of the rivers, lakes, and forests, provided they could be kept sober, and in proper subordination; but, once inflamed with liquor, to which they were madly addicted, all the dormant passions inherent in their nature were prone to break forth, and to hurry them into the most vindictive and bloody acts of violence." Though they generally pro-