

# The Lonesome Factory on Hudson's Bay

By J. B. Tyrrell and James Grant

**A**LMOST any Hudson's Bay post is a poor place to find company—unless it be the company of your own thoughts. But the post at Fort Churchill is just a few degrees more unhappy in this regard than any other.

Scattered over thousands of miles of Canadian wilderness lie these grey, weather-beaten houses, some more pretentious than others, where a lone man, with a white wife, perhaps, or native wife, carries on trade with the Indians in the territory round about. Each of them is sufficiently removed from the outside world, although some have a rival of the Revillon Freres nearby for company; some have Indians close in around them; some are on the trails used by engineers, surveyors, or geologists inland bound; and some are even within a few days of the railways. But others have no mitigating circumstances, and of these is Fort Churchill.

It lies on the west coast of Hudson's Bay, as far north of the city of Toronto as Toronto is north of New Orleans. The settlement, as I knew it eighteen years ago and as it remains with only a few changes, consists of twenty-five half-breeds, the factor and his family, the missionary and his family, and the dogs. It lies on a little ledge of arid ground on the edge of the Churchill River, just near where the river, having widened into a great lagoon, flows into Hudson's Bay. The lagoon and the bay lie in front of the post. Behind it is a ridge of rock, perhaps a hundred feet high, over which in winter the snow drifts until it buries the post above the eaves of its ugly buildings. It is not even in a wooded country, where the forest might lend a little interest to life by its presence

there, or out of which might come animals or Indians that might create some diversion, that might even offer to destroy the post and so confer a little excitement. No such good fortune. For hundreds of miles around is a swampy country dotted at intervals with a few trees that maintain a difficult footing in the uncertain soil. The Indians that come to trade are from, perhaps, three hundred miles inland. They come but twice a year. The Esquimaux arrive from up the coast towards the northern lights. Once a year—in August it used to be, and it may be yet for all I know—the company's ship pays its visit, renews the stores, takes off the furs and carries back the report of the factor and perhaps a letter or two from the factor's wife and the missionary's wife, to the people "at home." Once or twice a year there is a coasting trip up the shore among the Esquimaux. On Sundays and holidays the missionary in the Anglican Church prays for the King and the Queen and such as are in peril on the sea, but the most sincere part of the prayer is the simple little line about daily bread. Because daily bread in Churchill is not always a certainty for the half-breed congregation, and it is just as well, when praying, to ask for it anyway.

It is eighteen years since first I was there. Mr. Hawes was the trader then and Bishop Lofthouse, who is now at Kenora, was the "Church Missionary Society" missionary in the place. Lofthouse was just a plain, ordinary variety of hero, by which I mean that he did nothing sensational, such as is nowadays called heroism, but he *lived* for about fifteen years in that forsaken country because he believed it was his duty—it must have required a large faith in his duty. With