

in force to secure the servants against the possibility of a-surprise during a trade, for the wily Blackfeet seize every opportunity to overpower the garrison and help themselves, to the complete collapse of profit on the trade to the Hudson's Bay Company. Bars, bolts, locks, sliding-doors, and places to fire down upon the Indians, abound in every direction, and the apartments in which the Indians assemble to trade are cut off from all communication with the remaining rooms of the fort. In effect, the customers of this isolated mercantile establishment are handled very much after the manner of a hot coal, and surrounded, metaphorically speaking, with sheet-iron guards lest damage might result to the holder.

When the Blackfeet have accumulated a sufficient number of peltries to warrant a visit to the Rocky-Mountain House, two or three envoys, or forerunners, are chosen, and are sent in advance of the main body, by a week or more, to announce their approach and notify the officer in charge of the quantity of provisions, peltries, robes, horses, etc., which they would have to dispose of; and also to ascertain the whereabouts of their hereditary enemies, the Crees and Mountain Assiniboin. The envoys prepare for state visits of this nature by an assumption of their gaudiest apparel, and a more than usual intensity of paint: scarlet leggins and blankets; abundance of ribbons in the cap, if any be worn, or the head-band trimmed with beads and porcupine-quills, while the bulk of the cap is made of the plumage of birds; again, a single feather from the wing of an eagle or white-bird, fastened in the scalp-lock, or the hair platted in a long cue behind, and two shorter ones hanging down on each side in front, each bound round with coils of bright brass wire; round the eyes a halo of bright vermilion, a streak down the nose, a patch on each cheek, and a circle round the mouth of the same color, constitute the effective head-gear of the advance-agents. The remainder of the costume is modified by climate and seasons. In the summer they are almost naked, seldom wearing more than the *azain*, or loin-cloth. In the colder months they wear clothing made of the skins of wild animals, dressed, or with fur on; soft moccasins of deer-skin, brightly ornamented with pigments, beads, and stained quills of the porcupine; leather stockings or leggins of dressed deer-skin, ornamented generally by fringes of the same material, covering the moccasins and reaching nearly to the body, and suspended by a thong round the abdomen. With the females the leggins extend from the feet to the knees, below which they are fastened by a beaded and quilled garter. A shirt, made of soft buffalo-skin, and a necklace of bear's-claws and teeth, together with a fire-bag and tobacco-pipe—the inseparable companions of every Indian—complete the costume. The forerunner is anxious to make every article of his elaborate toilet tell with effect, as his mission is regarded as an important one, in which a failure to produce a favorable impression on the mind of the trader would be fraught with disastrous consequences to the prospective trade.

Upon arriving at the post, the envoys are re-

ceived and handsomely entertained by the officer in charge, who makes them presents according to their rank, and in proportion to the anticipated value of the trade. They are feasted, smoked, and, upon occasion, wine to a considerable extent. In turn, they report the number of peltries, horses, etc., to be traded by the band, and name the articles likely to be most in demand by their brethren. Such goods are at once placed where they may be easily accessible, and the quantity, if inadequate, is augmented by supplies procured at the nearest post, should there be sufficient time for that purpose. The forerunners are shown the stock of merchandise on hand, and the quality of the goods; the values of different articles are explained to them, and the fullest understanding upon all matters relative to the trade is arrived at. This completed, and a few days of long-ing indulged in, the advance-agents depart to their tribe, and the little garrison of the Mountain House prepare for the coming struggle.

Within the fort a searching examination is made of the efficient working of all bolts, locks, gratings, etc., and of the closing of all means of communication between the Indian-room—a large apartment in which the Blackfeet assemble previous to being admitted into the trading-store—and the rest of the buildings; guns are newly cleaned, reloaded, and placed, together with abundant ammunition, by the numerous loop-holes in the lofts above the trading and Indian rooms. From the shelves of the former are taken most of the blankets, colored cloths, guns, ammunition, ribbons, bright handkerchiefs, beads, etc., the staple commodities of the Indian trade, with a view of decreasing the excitement under which the red-man always labors when brought into immediate juxtaposition with so much bravery—an excitement which renders him oblivious to furnishing an equivalent in exchange, and tends to foster his habits of forcible seizure. Preparations are also made within the stockade for the reception of the ponies to be purchased, and their safe-keeping afterward, for the Blackfeet's fine sense of humor frequently leads him to ride away an animal he has just sold, by way of practical joke upon the owner.

All things being made secure, there remains for the use of the Blackfeet the narrow passage-way leading from the outer gate of the stout log stockade to the Indian-room—a passage tightly walled up with smooth logs, in which no interstices or footholds occur, in order, to prevent all entrance into the yard of the inclosure, the Indian-room itself, and the small hall-way leading from it to the trading-store. This latter is closed by two heavy doors, the space between being barely sufficient to accommodate two persons standing with their peltries. In trading but two Indians are admitted into the trading-store at one time, after the following fashion: The passage-door leading into the Indian-room is opened, and two braves admitted therein; then it is closed, and the other door leading into the trading-store opened. When the two warriors have finished trading, their return to the Indian-room is effected by a similar process, one door always being kept shut. Both these doors are

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