

tions were given to the men to protect themselves, especially in the winter. Scouts were to reconnoiter every day, and did they not return by nightfall, everything was to be got ready for a siege. At all times the cannon were to be in order, and all obstructions that might impede the view from the fort were to be cleared away.

Hampered by these restrictions, which were as unnecessary as they were burdensome, the officials naturally enough preferred the comfortable, if commonplace, life at the forts to the discomforts, difficulties, and dangers inseparable from expeditions into the interior. Thus it came about that more than a century elapsed before they first made their way into the Red River region, which subsequently became the center of their operations. But, in the mean time, the French Canadians were showing a far different spirit. Knowing nothing about the exclusive privileges of the company, or caring less if they did happen to be informed, their *courcurs du bois*, following in the track of La Verandrye, year by year, in increasing numbers, set out from Montreal, ascended the Ottawa, made their way by portage, lake, and stream to Lake Nipissing, thence into the greater Lake Huron, across that inland ocean, Lake Superior, to its farthest shore, where the Kaminitiquia was entered, and the voyage continued through Lac la Pluie (Rainy Lake) and river, over Lac du Bois (Lake of the Woods), and down the River Quinipique (Winnipeg) into the lake of the same name; thus reaching the borders of the fertile prairies, where the buffalo took the place of the deer, and which rolled away in billows of verdure until they broke at the base of the Rocky Mountains, where the terrible grizzly met the trappers with fearless front.

These *courcurs du bois* were perfectly adapted for their business. They always maintained the best of terms with the Indians. They treated them as their equals. "With that light-hearted bravery and cheerful fortitude so common among the descendants of the French," writes one of their eulogists, "they sought out the savage in his wigwam. They often spent the whole winter with him, bearing wit' all his rudeness and caprices, and winning their way to his heart before they

asked for his furs. Quick to learn the Indian languages and the tricks of Indian life, fertile in expedients, they were loyal and warm-hearted to the core. They were not mere calculating-machines or animated money-bags. Instead of waiting for the savage, they met him on his own ground, and began by making him presents of trinkets and tobacco, and not until they had him in good-humor did they broach the question of trade."

Naturally enough, the Indian very much preferred dealing with these fascinating fellows, who came right to his wigwam, to traveling away up to the Hudson's Bay fort, where he would be stiffly received by an official who spoke to him through a barred window, and whose manner seemed to say: "Be off as soon as you are fleeced," and the consequence was that the pick of the peltry found its way into the hands of the French, and went by the overland route to Montreal, while only the beaver and otter skins got up to Hudson's Bay. It was not long before the managers of the company realized that this state of things must not be permitted to continue, and again and again we find the General Court writing to the factors and urging upon them the necessity of securing other furs than beaver and otter. In response to these repeated demands, the factors sought to extend the sphere of their operations by establishing forts farther inland. As, year by year, they thus made their way to the south and west, it could only be a question of time when they must encounter the ever-increasing stream of expeditions which had their source in Montreal; and the first meeting did take place in the year 1774 at Fort Cumberland, on the Saskatchewan River. "In that year," says Professor Bryce, "the two rival currents of trade, Canadian and English, met in the far northwest, and the struggle between them began, which for well-nigh fifty years went unceasingly on, now in dangerous eddy, then in boiling whirlpool, till at length as one stream they flowed on together in one course."

The struggle thus referred to forms the most exciting portion of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at the same time the portion concerning which, owing to the bewildering variety of contradictory evidence, it is most difficult to arrive at clear and satisfactory conclu-