

ers who never came back to inquire for them."

It was not long ago that conditions existed such as in that region rendered the disappearance of a traveller more than a possibility. The wretched, squat, bow-legged, dirty laborers of that coast, who now dress as we do, and earn good wages in the salmon-fishing and canning industries, were not long ago very numerous, and still more villanous. They were not to be compared with the plains Indians as warriors or as men, but they were more treacherous, and wanting in high qualities. In the interior to-day are some Indians such as they were who are accused of cannibalism, and who have necessitated warlike defences at distant trading-posts. Travellers who escaped Indian treachery risked starvation, and stood their chances of losing their reckoning, of freezing to death, of encounters with grizzlies, of snow-slides, of canoe accidents in rapids, and of all the other casualties of life in a territory which to-day is not half explored. Those are not the trunks of Hudson Bay men, for such would have been sent home to English and Scottish mourners; they are the luggage of chance men who happened along, and outfitted at the old post before going farther. But the company's men were there before them, had penetrated the region farther and earlier, and there they are to-day, carrying on the fur trade under conditions strongly resembling those their predecessors once encountered at posts that are now towns in farming regions, and where now the locomotive and the steamer are familiar vehicles. Moreover, the status of the company in British Columbia is its status all the way across the North from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

To me the most interesting and picturesque life to be found in North America, at least north of Mexico, is that which is occasioned by this principal phase of the company's operations. In and around the fur trade is found the most notable relic of the white man's earliest life on this continent. Our wild life in this country is, happily, gone. The frontiersman is more difficult to find than the frontier, the cowboy has become a laborer almost like any other, our Indians are as the animals in our parks, and there is little of our country that is not threaded by railroads or wagonways. But in new or western Canada

this is not so. A vast extent of it north of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which hugs our border, has been explored only as to its waterways, its valleys, or its open plains, and where it has been traversed much of it remains as Nature and her near of kin, the red men, had it of old. On the streams canoes are the vehicles of travel and of commerce; in the forests "trails" lead from trading-post to trading-post, the people are Indians, half-breeds, and Esquimaux, who live by hunting and fishing as their forebears did; the Hudson Bay posts are the seats of white population; the post factors are the magistrates.

All this is changing with a rapidity which history will liken to the sliding of scenes before the lens of a magic-lantern. Miners are crushing the foot-hills on either side of the Rocky Mountains, farmers and cattle-men have advanced far northward on the prairie and on the plains in narrow lines, and railroads are pushing hither and thither. Soon the limits of the inhospitable zone this side of the Arctic Sea, and of the marshy weakly wooded country on either side of Hudson Bay, will circumscribe the fur-trader's field, except in so far as there may remain equally permanent hunting-grounds in Labrador and in the mountains of British Columbia. Therefore now, when the Hudson Bay Company is laying the foundations of widely different interests, is the time for halting the old original view that stood in the stereopticon for centuries, that we may see what it revealed, and will still show far longer than it takes for us to view it.

The Hudson Bay Company's agents were not the first hunters and fur-traders in British America, ancient as was their foundation. The French, from the Canadas, preceded them no one knows how many years, though it is said that it was as early as 1627 that Louis XIII. chartered a company of the same sort and for the same aims as the English company. What ever came of that corporation I do not know, but by the time the Englishmen established themselves on Hudson Bay, individual Frenchmen and half-breeds had penetrated the country still farther west. They were of hardy, adventurous stock, and they loved the free roving life of the trapper and hunter. Fitted out by the merchants of Canada, they would pursue the waterways which