

French predecessors. They were influenced, no doubt, likewise by a desire to leave the Hudson's Bay Company unmolested in the comparatively narrow sphere to which they had hitherto confined their operations in the country immediately surrounding the Bay. The latter had, however, as previously stated, already commenced moving their posts westward. This soon brought the two companies into collision, and a keen competition now commenced, which, confined at first to their respective outposts, soon spread over the greater part of the country east of the Rocky Mountains. Such a competition, carried on in a country remote from civilisation and the restraints of law, could scarcely fail to be marked by many revolting scenes of rapacity and violence. Personal conflicts with fists between the men, and not unfrequently between the clerks and partners of the rival companies, were of the commonest occurrence, and not unfrequently more deadly weapons were employed. Stratagem was, however, more frequently resorted to than open violence. In ignorance of the value of the furs, which formed the object of such eager contention, the hunts of the Indian were generally at the disposal of the first trader who reached his encampment. On both sides, men were constantly kept on the look-out for parties of natives returning from their hunting expeditions, whose duty it was to waylay them, and ply them with fire-water, and 'all the arts of cozenage,' until every skin had been obtained from them, if possible, before the opposite party could arrive at the scene.

As the rival trading-posts were generally built within 200 or 300 yards of each other, it was by no means easy for either party to steal a march upon the other. Mr Ballantyne relates an anecdote in his *Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay*, which will serve to shew how a feat of this kind could now and then, however, be accomplished:—

'Although the individuals of the two companies,' he says, 'were almost always at enmity at the forts, strange to say they often acted in the most friendly manner to each other, and—except when furs were in question—more agreeable or friendly neighbours seldom came together than the Hudson's Bay and North-west Companies when they planted their forts—which they often did—within 200 yards of each other in the wilds of North America. The clerks and labourers of the opposing establishments constantly visited each other; and during the Christmas and New-year's holidays, parties and balls were given without number. Dances, however, were not confined entirely to the holidays; but whenever one was given at an unusual time, it was generally for the purpose of drawing the attention of the entertained party from some movement of their entertainers. Thus, upon one occasion, the Hudson's Bay Company's look-out reported that he had discovered the tracks of Indians in the snow, and that he thought they had just returned from a hunting expedition. No sooner was this heard, than a grand ball was given to the North-west