

# HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

VOL. LXXXIV.

MARCH, 1892.

No. DII.

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## "TALKING MUSQUASH."

BY JULIAN RALPH.

THE most sensational bit of "musquash talk" in more than a quarter of a century among the Hudson Bay Company's employés was started the other day, when Sir Donald A. Smith, the president of the oldest of England's great trading companies, sent a type-written letter to Winnipeg. If a Cree squaw had gone to the trading-shop at Moose Factory and asked for a bustle and a box of face-powder in exchange for a beaver-skin, the suggestion of changing conditions in the fur trade would have been trifling compared with the sense of instability to which this appearance of machine-writing gave rise. The reader may imagine for himself what a wrench civilization would have gotten if the world had laid down its goose-quills and taken up the type-writer all in one day. And that is precisely what Sir Donald Smith had done. The quill that had served to convey the orders of Alexander Mackenzie had satisfied Sir George Simpson; and, in our own time, while men like Lord Iddesleigh, Lord Kimberley, and Mr. Goschen sat around the candle-lighted table in the board-room of the company in London, quill pens were the only ones at hand. But Sir Donald's letter was not only the product of a machine; it contained instructions for the use of the type-writer in the offices at Winnipeg, and there was in the letter a protest against illegible manual chirography such as had been received from many factories in the wilderness. Talking business in the fur trade has always been called "talking musquash" (musik-rat), and after that letter came the turn taken by that form of talk suggested a general fear that from the Arctic to our border and from Labrador to Queen Charlotte's Islands the canvassers for competing machines will be

"racing" in all the posts, each to prove that his instrument can pound out more words in a minute than any other—in those posts where life has hitherto been taken so gently that when one day a factor heard that the battle of Waterloo had been fought and won by the English, he deliberately loaded the best trade gun in the storehouse and went out and fired it into the pulseless woods, although it was two years after the battle, and the disquieted Old World had long known the greater news that Napoleon was caged in St. Helena. The only reassuring note in the "musquash talk" to-day is sounded when the subject of candles is reached. The governor and committee in London still pursue their deliberations by candle-light.

But rebellion against their fate is idle, and it is of no avail for the old factors to make the point that Sir Donald found no greater trouble in reading their writing than they encountered when one of his missives had to be deciphered by them. The truth is that the tide of immigration which their ancient monopoly first shunted into the United States is now sweeping over their vast territory, and altering more than its face. Not only are the factors aware that the new rule confining them to share in the profits of the fur trade leaves to the mere stockholders far greater returns from land sales and storekeeping, but a great many of them now find village life around their old forts, and railroads close at hand, and Law setting up its officers at their doors, so that in a great part of the territory the romance of the old life, and their authority as well, has fled.

Less than four years ago I had passed by Qu'Appelle without visiting it, but last

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