

stranger—above all, some titled member of the British nobility—to accompany them on this stately occasion, and grace their high solemnities. Fort William, the scene of this important annual meeting, was a considerable village on the banks of Lake Superior. Here, in an immense wooden building, was the great council-hall, as also the banqueting-chamber, decorated with Indian arms and accoutrements, and the trophies of the fur-trade. The house swarmed at this time with traders and voyageurs from Montreal bound to the interior posts, and some from the interior posts bound to Montreal. The councils were held in great state; for every member felt as if sitting in parliament, and every retainer and dependent looked up to the assemblage with awe as to the House of Lords. There was a vast deal of solemn deliberation and hard Scottish reasoning, with an occasional swell of pompous declamation. These grave and weighty councils were alternated by huge feasts and revels, like some of the old feasts described in Highland castles. The tables in the great banqueting-room groaned under the weight of game of all kinds—of venison from the woods and fish from the lakes, with hunter's delicacies, such as buffaloes' tongues and beaver's tails, and various luxuries from Montreal, all served up by experienced cooks brought for the purpose. There was no stint of generous wine, for it was a hard-drinking period—a time of loyal toasts and Bacchanalian song and brimming bumpers.

While the chiefs thus revelled in the hall, and made the rafters resound with bursts of loyalty and old Scottish songs, chanted in voices cracked and sharpened by the northern blast, their merriment was echoed and prolonged by a mongrel legion of retainers—Canadian voyageurs, half-breed Indian hunters, and vagabond hangers-on—who feasted sumptuously without, on the crumbs from their table, and made the welkin ring with old French ditties, mingled with Indian yelps and yellings.

‘One or two partners,’ he adds, ‘recently from the interior posts, would occasionally make their appearance in New York in the course of a tour of pleasure or curiosity. On these occasions, there was always a degree of magnificence of the purse about them, and a peculiar propensity to expenditure at the goldsmiths' and jewellers' for rings, chains, brooches, necklaces, jewelled watches, and other rich trinkets, partly for their own wear, partly for presents to their female acquaintances—a gorgeous prodigality, such as was often noticed in former times in West Indian planters and Eastern nabobs flush with the spoils of Oriental conquest.’

Such were the results which, in a few years, marked the prosperity of this energetic association. In an incredibly short period, the whole of the immense region, extending from the confines of Canada to Slave Lake on the north, and the Pacific Ocean on the west, was studded by the remote posts of the company, where they carried on their traffic with the surrounding tribes. Their trade appears to have taken this direction, in the first instance, chiefly with the view of appropriating and extending that of their