

attractions not so evident in the glorious days of midsummer. Then are the men thrown upon their own resources for entertainment, and whether the hours pass brightly or heavily will depend upon themselves. There is very little work to be done. The furs have to be sorted, locked to frequently, and packed in readiness for the coming of spring; and visits may be exchanged with the nearest fort. Those who like to dabble in ink have now a fine opportunity to write up their diaries; and others, with a taste for natural history, can amuse themselves in mounting and preserving specimens; while the studiously inclined can follow their favorite lines of study.

The northern mail starts out from Winnipeg early in December. It consists of two or more toboggans drawn by dogs, and laden with strong wooden boxes in which is placed an astonishing amount of mail matter. Proceeding as far as possible along the frozen bosoms of the lakes and rivers, the train pushes northward at the rate of forty miles a day, the drivers on snow-shoes easily keeping pace with the well-broken dogs, of which four are harnessed to each toboggan, until Fort Carlton, in the Saskatchewan valley, is reached. Here the entire mail is overhauled and repacked, branch packets being sent off east and west, while the main packet continues ever northward over the snow-billowed plains, across the deep-drifted valleys, through the sighing, shadowy forests, diminishing steadily in bulk as fort after fort is visited, until at last, reduced to a mere handful, that a man might put in his pocket, it reaches the end of its journey at Fort Yukon, upon the far frontier of Alaska.

When the young clerk first went out to Rupert's Land, a wife, as a *compagnon de voyage*, was not to be considered; and then, when the time came that he might indulge in matrimony, he was far away from the women of his own race, few,

indeed, of whom would be willing to stake their future upon the uncertainty of finding such domestic happiness in the wilds of North America as would compensate them for the loss of all the delights of civilization. The natural consequence was that, looking about him for a companion, he found his choice limited to the dusky belles of the Indians. Sons and daughters were born, and grew up, to win the love that was rarely bestowed upon the patient, faithful drudge of a mother. The natural affection of the father proved stronger than the artificial laws of society, and the connection thus strongly cemented continued unbroken to the end. The company made a point of encouraging this mating of the Indian races with their officers and men. It insured the good-will of the one, and bound the other to the country by ties not readily broken. So the children came in quiversful to the Macs and Pierres, and the blood of redskin warriors mingling with that of "Hieland lairds" and French *bourgeois* went flowing forth in a steady stream all through the mighty possessions of the company.

It seems as though I had but scratched the surface of the story of this great corporation, which for more than two centuries has wielded so profound an influence throughout the northern half of this continent. It may endure for many decades or even for centuries yet, but its career cannot be less prosaic than that of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The returns from sales of land already far overshadow the profits from the fur trade, and the latter must inevitably in time shrink into insignificance. However that may be, the "Honorable Company of Merchant Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay," looking back upon its records, may, with substantial reason, congratulate itself upon having contributed one of the most interesting chapters to the romance of commerce.



FORT ELLICE, MANITOBA.