

Original.

REMINISCENCES OF THE EARLY FUR-TRADE OF MONTREAL.

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The rise and progress of the fur-trade till 1800 has been so fully described in the introduction to Sir Alexr. MacKenzie's *Travels*, that any remarks of mine would be out of place. No other person could be better informed than the gentleman in question, and very few had such experience. For many years a resident in the Indian country, one of the chief partners in the Northwest Company, traversing in every direction the vast territory occupied by their trading-posts, celebrated as the discoverer of the river still known by his name, as well as his journey across half the continent, over the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, a perilous undertaking,*—none could be better qualified to place before us the history of the Fur-Trade, and accurate descriptions of the Northwest territory and its aborigines, than Sir A. MacKenzie—who had few competitors, and but one rival, in the great Company. But that rival, Simon MacTavish, was worthy of him. Equally familiar with the commerce of the interior, the aborigines, their manners, languages, and wants—equally enterprising, as he was bold in execution—in the affairs of the Company, he could suffer no equal, far less any control. Consequently, when, some ten or twelve years subsequent to his travels to the Pacific, Sir Alexander returned to Montreal, a violent quarrel took place, and MacTavish, for forty thousand pounds, got rid of this rival. MacKenzie proceeded to England, published his "*Travels*" in 1801, was knighted, and returned to Canada to establish the Southwest, in opposition to the Northwest, Company. Trading chiefly in the territory of the United States, and opposed, as well by the newly-formed American Fur Company, under Astor, as by multitudes of private adventurers, the South-

west Company was not, I believe, very successful, nor of long duration.

The Southwest Company's trade was chiefly in the territory of the United States. That of the Northwest Company extended from the head waters of the Mississippi to the Icy Sea—from the River St. Maurice to the Pacific Ocean, and—as lessees of the King's Posts—eastward to the Atlantic; an immense dominion, claimed and held by Canada, from the earliest period of European occupation on this continent, as indisputably forming part of her territory.

As the general business of the Northwest Company was centred at Montreal, and conducted under the firm of McTavish, Frobisher,* & Co., the headquarters were considered to be at the "Grand Portage," on the northwest side of Lake Superior, where, annually, in the month of June or July, the partners from the interior met those from Canada, and—after examining the state of the Company's affairs, and concerting its future operations—presents were distributed among the Indian hunters; deserving servants suitably rewarded, and some weeks pleasantly spent, before some returned to their desks, and others to another dreary twelvemonth at the various isolated posts. Until later years, when the Company had sailing vessels on the upper lakes, the supplies for the fur-trade were conveyed to the "Grand Portage" by the way of the Ottawa river, Lake Nipissing, and the northern coasts of Lakes Huron and Superior, in large birch canoes of five or six tons burthen, navigated by numerous crews—and from the "Grand Portage" to the various distant posts in the interior by smaller birch canoes, called "North canoes," navigated by seven or eight men, who, from their hard fare, had the *soubriquet* of

* Although this gentleman allowed his name to continue in the firm, he had, like many other partners in the Company, retired from its business with an ample fortune, and settled at Montreal. Of these gentlemen it is only necessary to mention the names of Jacob Jordan, John Gregory, Toussaint Pothier, Nicolas Montour, Roderic and Henry MacKenzie, Norman McLeod, &c.

* "The most arduous, perhaps the most difficult, ever performed by man."—Macgregor; vol. 1, p. 517.