

for the year did not exceed £40,000; but by the exertion, enterprise, and industry of the proprietors, it was brought in eleven years to triple that amount and upwards—yielding proportionate profits, and surpassing, in short, anything known in America.’

The agents who presided over the affairs of the company at head-quarters, were of course personages of great weight and importance in the concern. Consisting, in at least the later years of the company, chiefly of veteran partners and traders who had gained distinction in the rough campaigns of the north, they were a class *sui generis*, living in lordly and hospitable style, and forming a sort of commercial aristocracy in the society of Quebec and Montreal. It was during the palmy days of the company, while on a short visit to Canada, that Washington Irving had an opportunity of witnessing something of the feudal magnificence which characterised the proceedings of these magnates of the North-west, and of which he has left us, in *Astoria*, a lively sketch. ‘To behold the North-west Company in all its state and grandeur,’ says he, ‘it was necessary to witness an annual gathering at the great interior place of conference, established at Fort-William, near what is called the Grand Portage, on Lake Superior. Here, two or three of the leading partners from Montreal proceeded once a year to meet the partners from the various trading-posts of the wilderness, to discuss the affairs of the company during the preceding year, and to arrange plans for the future.

‘On these occasions might be seen the change since the unceremonious times of the old French traders—now the aristocratical character of the Briton shone forth magnificently, or rather the feudal spirit of the Highlander. Every partner who had charge of an interior post, and a score of retainers at his command, felt like the chieftain of a Highland clan, and was almost as important in the eyes of his dependents as of himself. To him a visit to the grand conference at Fort William was a most important event, and he repaired there as to a meeting of parliament. The partners from Montreal, however, were the lords of the ascendant. Coming from the midst of luxurious and ostentatious life, they quite eclipsed their compeers from the woods, whose forms and faces had been battered and hardened by hard living and hard service, and whose garments and equipments were all the worse for wear. Indeed, the partners from below considered the whole dignity of the company as represented in their own persons, and conducted themselves in suitable style. They ascended the rivers in great state, like sovereigns making a progress, or rather like Highland chieftains navigating their subject lakes. They were wrapped in rich furs, their huge canoes freighted with every convenience and luxury, and manned by Canadian voyageurs as obedient as Highland clansmen. They carried up with them cooks and bakers, together with delicacies of every kind, and abundance of choice wines for the banquet which attended this great convocation. Happy were they, too, if they could meet with any distinguished