

out of this unprincipled competition, the leading individuals in Canada, concerned in the commerce, entered into a partnership in the winter of 1783, under the name of the North-west Company of Montreal—a name famous in the annals of the fur-trade, and which, from small beginnings, rose in a very few years to be the most powerful, energetic, and successful association which had hitherto engaged in the trade. At first, it was nothing more than a voluntary association of the most respectable merchants interested in the fur-trade, many of whom were engaged at the same time in other extensive concerns altogether foreign to it; but it soon assumed a more regular organisation. The concern was then divided into twenty shares, some of which were held by the persons who managed the business in Canada, and were called agents, and the remainder by proprietors, who wintered in the Indian country, and managed the trade with the natives, and were hence called 'wintering partners.' It was the duty of the agents to import the necessary goods from England, store them up in warehouses in Montreal, and prepare them for being sent into the interior. They were likewise expected to advance any cash that might be wanting for the outfits, for which they received a commission, independent of their share of the profits. Lastly, they received, packed up, and shipped the company's furs for England, to the proper agents to whom they were intrusted for sale, on which they had also a small commission. The wintering partners were not under any obligation to furnish capital; but as it was upon their energy, tact, and experience, that the prosperity of the association mainly depended, they were required to go through a strict probation before they could arrive at that enviable station. They were selected, in the first instance, from respectable families in Canada—generally Scotch emigrants—and entered the company's service under an apprenticeship for seven years, during which they received L.100 sterling, were maintained at the expense of the company, and furnished with suitable clothing and equipments. This probation was generally passed at the interior trading-posts, where they were removed for years from civilised society, leading a life almost as wild and precarious as the savages around them; but acquiring in the meantime a perfect knowledge of the Indian character, and of the resources of the country in which they lived. On the expiration of their apprenticeship, they received a salary of L.100 per annum, and were then eligible, on a vacancy, to promotion to a partnership, according to their merits and services. With ordinary good conduct, there were few young men who entered the service who found their reasonable expectations in this respect disappointed. No system, perhaps, could have been better devised for infusing activity into every department, and so extending the influence of the company, which was soon indeed practically demonstrated by the rapid prosperity to which it speedily attained. 'In 1788,' says Sir Alexander Mackenzie, 'the gross amount of the adventure