

rafters, the ponderous tables were laden with sylvan and civic dainties, and with wines mingling with Scottish whiskey and old Jamaica: they kept it up till most of them slipped down. Irving, who assisted at some of those carouses, speaks of the old Scottish songs, chanted in voices cracked and sharpened by the northern blasts. Outside the merriment was at least as boisterous, where bushrangers and boatmen, Indians and half-breeds, were regaling without stint, though upon coarser fare.

It was inevitable that the competing companies should clash sooner or later. They were divided by blood and religion as well as by trade jealousy. The *employees* of the Northern company were Scottish almost to a man; those of the Southern association were chiefly French Canadians or half-breeds, and superstitiously Catholic. When they did come together at last, they were always ready to fight, employing all the arts of Indian warfare. That most of the partners of the North-West were also Scottish did not tend to ameliorate matters, as they showed when Lord Selkirk's unfortunate Highland settlers on the Saskatchewan were ground to pieces between the upper and the nether millstone. It was on the Saskatchewan that the companies first came to blows. The case was something like our present troubles with pushing foreign neighbours in Africa. The North-Westers were in actual possession of the Saskatchewan valley, and claimed, besides, the legitimate succession to the old French explorers. The Hudson Bay Company held to a sort of hyperborean Munroe doctrine, which gave them all the unsettled territory they could grasp. If forgotten graves could give up their secrets, they could

tell many a tale of violence, treachery between Fort Garry and the Jasper House, on the eastern slope of the Rockies. Naturally neither Company cared to keep records of that ignominious and disgraceful warfare, when ambushed surprises, and slaughter swayed the balances and paid the demands. Forts were fired and stores destroyed or emptied. I can surmise something of the trade from the historical accounts of the unprovoked assaults of the North-Westerns on the Selkirk colonists. Then men were sacred, and women were spared, by ruffians, subsidised, mended, and rewarded by the chants of position and untold "respectability." The settlement was broken up for a time solely to preserve the fur monopoly, and its founder died at Pauze with a broken heart.

In the beginning of the century except for the Russians in Alaska, the American fur trade was a British monopoly. The North-West Company, in possession of all the borderland, had been increasing their enterprise far into territory belonging to the United States. Only nominally belonging, beyond the Mississippi the Americans had done nothing to explore their dominions or assert their rights. When commercial treaties had been signed with Canada in 1812, the Americans turned their attention seriously to furs. The Mackenzie Company was formed, and ended a brisk import business. It was the German emigrant, John Astor, who had the idea of himself a millionaire, and developing to the profit of his country the vast internal trade grounds of the unknown. He had started as a shopkeeper in a small way of business, and chance meeting on a sea-ward Pacific