

behavior. The braves, standing ready with their peltries, and eager to begin the trade, readily promise to observe his commands, and move up toward the gate of the stockade.

The trader having returned to the post, all preparations for the trade are completed, communication cut off, men all stationed at their posts ready for anything that may turn up. Then the outer gate is thrown open, and the eager crowd rushes into the Indian-room. In a moment the door leading into the little hall-way connecting that apartment with the trading-store slides back, and two Indians with their peltries enter. Then the door slides into place again, and the other one opens, admitting the braves into the store. They look through the grating, select the articles they want, and pay for them in installments. An Indian never asks at once for everything he wants, and then pays for it in one payment; but purchases one thing at a time, receives his change, then turns his attention to another. In this way he seems to get more for his money; and the linked sweetness of shopping is longer drawn out. The trade is rapidly pushed, and the braves are at once returned by the double-barred process to the Indian-room, and a fresh batch admitted, when the doors are again locked. The reappearance of each installment of fortunate braves, with the much-prized articles of ornament and use, continually augments the growing excitement of the waiting throng in the Indian-room. Each one is eagerly questioned as to what he saw, whether there was any of this or that article, and whether the supply would be likely to be exhausted before the questioner's turn arrived. Each succeeding statement that there were on the shelves but a few guns, blankets, a little tea, sugar, etc., intensifies the anxiety, and the crush to get in increases in proportion, under the belief that everything will be gone. The announcement by the trader, through a loop-hole, that there will be enough for all, scarcely allays the confusion in any measure, the universal desire and rush to obtain the first choice still remaining. Thus the trade progresses until all the furs and provisions have changed hands, and there is nothing more to be traded. Sometimes, however, the trade does not proceed so smoothly. It frequently happens that the Blackfeet repair to the fort with but a small collection of robes and leather, under which circumstances, being of a frugal mind, they object to seeing their stock in trade go for a little tea and sugar. These objections generally assume the shape of bullets and knife-hacking, of which the walls of the Indian-room bear plentiful evidence. Then the trading-store is promptly closed, only to be reopened when the sudden ebullition of anger has passed away.

Upon the completion of the exchange of peltries and goods begins the horse-trading; and the method of carrying it on depends much upon the humor which the Blackfeet exhibit. If they appear well satisfied with the trade of goods, then the horse-trading takes place immediately outside the stockade—the animals being led within as fast as purchased, and the Indians shown singly into the trad-

ing-store to be paid. If an aggressive spirit obtains, however, a single brave, with his pony or ponies, is admitted at a time within the yard of the stockade, the trade effected, and the owner paid and passed without the gate before the admission of a second. Perhaps a more than usual care is exercised during the progress of this trade, from the fact that the Blackfeet generally all gather about the stockade at that time, and, the majority being already supplied with goods, they fail to recognize the necessity of longer preserving peaceful relations with the traders.

A peculiarity of these trades lies in the fact that money values are unknown, everything being reckoned by skins, as is the case throughout a great portion of the company's territory. The skin is a very old term in the fur-trade, and is based upon the standard of the beaver-skin, or, as it is called, the made beaver. For example: a beaver, or skin, is reckoned equivalent to one mink-skin; one marten is equal to two skins, one buffalo-robe to six skins, a silver fox to twenty skins, and so on throughout the scale of furs. In a like manner all articles of merchandise have their value in skins. Thus a brave brings a pony, which is valued at fifty skins, and these fifty skins will be divided as follows: a kettle, five skins; a blanket, ten skins; a capote, ten skins; ammunition, ten skins; tobacco, fifteen skins. The brave hands over the pony, and receives in payment a capote, a blanket, a kettle, ammunition, and tobacco. The original skin, the beaver, now seldom makes its appearance at the Mountain House, those animals having been nearly exterminated in that part of the territory; but, notwithstanding the fact of the marked deterioration in the price of the beaver-skin, since it was originally adopted as the standard of value in the fur-trade, owing to the extensive use of silk in the manufacture of hats, it still nominally retains the fictitious value first placed upon it.

A somewhat amusing illustration of the universal passion for dress, which forms a distinguishing characteristic of the Blackfeet, equally with other Indians, occurs in these trades. The fashionable costume of the red-man is not generally regulated by the variable moods of the mercurial Parisian; indeed, it has undergone but little change since the memory of men. Certain interesting specimens of the race are said to have been seen attired in even less than the vaunted Mexican costume—a shirt-collar and pair of spurs. I myself remember to have seen one chastily appareled in a stove-pipe hat. But it frequently occurs, during the trades, that some doughty chieftain elects to appear in more than regal magnificence before his tribe; and for his benefit, and those of similar tastes, the company annually import certain ancient costumes prevalent in England some half-century since. The tall, stove-pipe hat, with round, narrow brim; the snuff-brown or bright-blue coat, with high collar, climbing up over the neck, the sleeves tightly fitting, the waist narrow—this is the Blackfeet's ideal of perfection in dress, and the brave who can array himself in this antique garb struts out from the fort the envy and admiration of all beholders. Often the high hat is orna-