

obtained with little effort, and in great abundance. Winter fare comprises fresh bear and beaver meat occasionally; but pemmican, or dried buffalo and reindeer flesh, requiring vigorous mastication, is the ordinary dish, as the animals can then be rarely captured, having retired from the wind-swept plains to the shelter of distant woods. Two meals a day—at ten o'clock in the morning, and between four and six in the afternoon—are the usual repasts. Lieut. Hooper, who wintered at Fort New Franklin in 1849-50, in his account of the sojourn, mentions the very remarkable fact of the rabbits, throughout the whole region, being subject to periodical conditions of increase and reduction in their numbers. They overrun the country in astonishing quantities at one period, gradually lessen annually, until very few can be caught; then, having arrived at their minimum, they gradually increase, until the animals become as abundant as before. These cycles of progress and decay comprehend an interval of about eight or ten years. Several causes have been assigned for this extraordinary ebb and flow of life. Some assert that the rabbits migrate at regular intervals, to avoid the merciless persecutions of their many enemies—the lynx, wolf, fox, marten, and ermine. Others refer the circumstance to the periodical visitation of an epidemic. However this may be, the fluctuation has an important effect upon the fur trade. In the year succeeding that when the rabbits are most plentiful, the fur-bearing animals, whose prey they become, are most abundant, while the year following that of their greatest decrease is the most deficient in its supply of furs.

Plenty in summer, amounting to even wasteful abundance, often alternates at the isolated northern posts with absolute scarcity and positive famine in winter, owing to the migration of the larger animals, and failure in the arrival of customary supplies. Frightful crimes have been committed by the Indians to assuage the pangs of hunger; and even the whites—French Canadians and half-castes—have been driven to cannibalism by the pressure of the same dire necessity. During the winter of 1845 the Company's people at Fort Good Hope were short of provisions, and the Indians in the neighborhood were on the verge of starvation. One night the persons in charge of the station heard

the blows of the ax in the lodges around the Fort, by which the weaker were killed, in order to be devoured. Two expressmen, one Scotch and the other a native of the Orkneys, who were proceeding with letters to Fort Macpherson, met with a party of starving savages, who stole upon them in the night, murdered, and ate them, along with their provisions. While Lieut. Hooper was at Fort New Franklin, an old Indian hunter was located there, who had several times sustained life by feeding upon the corpses of those who had perished from famine, among whom were included his own parents, one wife, and the children of two. On one occasion this man made his appearance at Fort Norman to solicit food, and had, at the same time, the hands of his brother-in-law in his game-bag! At Fort Simpson there was another Indian, named Geero, who, according to report, had assisted in the consumption of eighteen individuals, and was said to prefer human flesh to any other kind of food. The lieutenant, being desirous of going off for a few days into the woods to find reindeer or moose, wished to have Geero for his companion and guide; but the Indian refused the service, and, on being pressed for a reason, he frankly told the interpreter that he did not dare to trust himself with any one alone in the woods, as he might be tempted to treat himself to a repast of his much-esteemed fare! The officer did not further solicit the honor of his company.

Some of the tribes, as the Slaves and Dog-ribs, are indifferent to these horrors; but others are less callous, and regard with abhorrence those who overcome a period of exigency by such revolting means. In the spring of the year 1850, which followed a terribly trying winter, an Indian of the Beaver tribe came to Dunvegan Fort, but refused to exchange greetings with the persons in charge of the post. When asked the reason of his unfriendly demeanor, he replied: "I am not worthy to shake hands with men; I am no longer a man, for I have eaten man's flesh. It is true I was starving, was dying of hunger, but I cannot forgive myself. The thought of the act is killing to me, and I shall die soon, and with contentment; for although I still exist, I cannot any longer consider myself a human being."

Such are some phases of life on the