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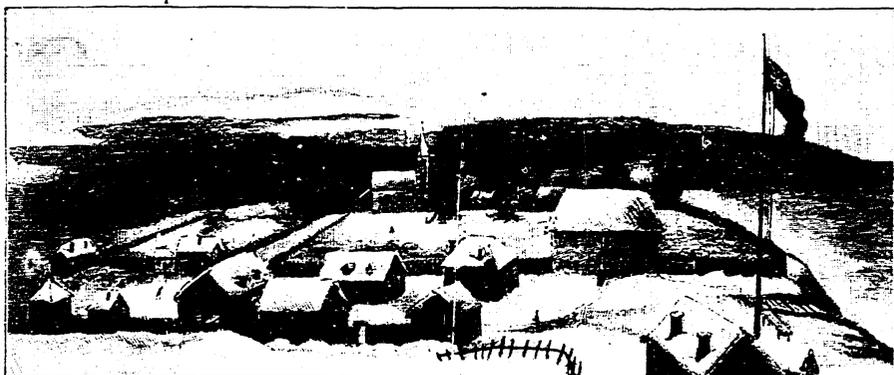
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FORT SIMPSON IN WINTER.

## THE ROMANTIC STORY OF A GREAT CORPORATION.

(THE HUDSON'S BAY TRADING COMPANY.)—PART I.

BY J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

THERE has been a romance of commerce no less than a romance of war. Men have shown an equal enterprise and daring in enlarging incomes as in extending the bounds of empire, and gold has run close rivalry with glory in adding brilliant pages to the world's history.

Unquestionably the most striking chapters in the romance of commerce relate to two remarkable corporations, which, though having much in common in their constitution and powers, were singularly dissimilar in the nature of their domain and character of their product. They both had their birth in England in the seventeenth century. They both were nominally mere trading associations, having nothing more ambitious in view than the securing of large dividends for their shareholders, yet in reality held almost imperial sway over uncounted leagues of territory. They were both the subject of fierce attacks that at times put their very existence in jeopardy, and in the end they had both to succumb to the resistless march of civilization, which in these latter days, when the ends of the earth are drawing nearer together, could not tolerate the idea of commercial corporations keeping to themselves vast landed possessions fit to be the homes of nations. So much had these two mighty corporations alike; but while the one bargained, intrigued, fought, and waxed opulent under the burning rays of an Oriental sun, the other pursued a quieter though hardly less prosperous career amidst the snowy wilderness of this western world. It is the story of the latter which I shall attempt to outline on the present paper.

It was in the merry days of the Restoration, when the second Charles might well be lavish toward those who had faithfully served his father "of sacred memory," that to a hero of many battles, retired upon his laurels to spend a well-earned furlough in fascinating if not particularly fruitful chemical experiments, appeared one Des Groseliers, an enterprising Frenchman who had traveled much in North America, and made acquaintance with the Indian tribes inhabiting the southern part of the Hudson Bay region. Monsieur Des Groseliers' story was calculated to fire the heart of a less adventurous being than Prince Rupert, whose attention had, indeed, been already drawn to that *terra incognita*, by reading in Marco Polo how the renowned Venetian traveler found in the tent of the Grand Khan of Tartary furs and sables "brought from the North, the land of darkness," and had thereby stirred within him the thought of what a splendid scheme it would be to put forth an organized effort to tap this treasury of precious peltries. The Frenchman found an interested listener; and the sequel was that after an

experimental trip had been made, in 1668, with encouraging results, a joint-stock company of noblemen and gentry, with "our dear and entirely beloved cousin, Prince Rupert, Count Palatine of the Rhine," as its leading spirit, was formed under the imposing title of "The Honorable Governor and Company of Merchant Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay," and having for its motto the words "*Pro pelle cutem*"—an application of Scripture whose wit and felicity it would not be easy to parallel. This corporation in the year 1670 obtained from the free-handed king a charter investing it with the monopoly of the furs and lands of all the borders of all the streams flowing into Hudson's Bay, not occupied by the subject of any Christian prince; and furthermore, the privilege to make war and peace with the people not subjects of any Christian prince. The nominal consideration for this royal bounty was the annual payment of two elks and two black beavers, which, however, were only to be exacted when the sovereign should happen to be within the territories granted. It is immensely to the credit of the Hudson's Bay Company that these practically unlimited powers were from the first wielded with marked moderation, humanity, and equity; so that, without in any wise intending it, the corporation undoubtedly became a factor of inestimable value in the subsequent peaceable occupation of the north-west by the white settlers.

The first post established by the company was Moose Factory, at the mouth of the river running into the extreme south of James Bay; Forts Albany, York, and Churchill, commanding the whole western shore of Hudson's Bay, followed in due time, and each succeeding year found the company waxing more prosperous and powerful. They were not, however, to have it all their own way, remote as the field of their operations might seem to be from centers of human interest. The value of the Hudson's Bay territories was by no means unknown to the French, who were then masters of Canada; and long before Prince Rupert acted as the promoter of the English company a charter had been conferred by Louis XIII. upon a number of his subjects, containing terms almost identical with those granted by

his "dear cousin" Charles. Thus was the Company of New France founded, on the 27th of April, 1627.

Nor were the pretensions of the French without foundation. Fourteen years before the date of the Hudson's Bay Company's charter, Jean Bourdon, sometime chief engineer and *Procureur* of New France, claimed to have penetrated overland as far as the shore of the bay, and to have taken possession of the neighboring territories in the name of Louis XIV.; and six years later the Des Groseliers already mentioned did, without doubt, reach the bay by sea, and establish a trading-post there; while the following year Desprès Couture, if he is to be relied upon, made his way overland to the bay, and buried, at the foot of a big tree, a French flag, a sword, and a plate of copper, having engraved upon it the arms of the French king, in token of the occupation of the country in his majesty's name. If these interesting relics could only be resurrected now how precious they would be. Under these circumstances the French could hardly be blamed for contesting the occupation of the country by the English company, and in 1686 the renowned Sieur d'Iberville, supported by two of his hardly less famous brothers, headed a hostile expedition into the bay, which captured three out of the five forts established by the company, and several of its vessels into the bargain.

This was the beginning of a warfare which waged intermittently between the two powers, with varying success, for more than a century, and seriously interfered with the operations of the company, whose forts were occupied, trade interrupted, and energies weakened from time to time. Nevertheless, although the records show that between 1682 and 1688 its losses amounted to one hundred and twenty thousand pounds, so enormous were the profits upon its operations that its annual dividends averaged from twenty-five to fifty per cent., and the stock soon became the most "gilt-edged" investment of the day, the shares being practically never in the market, but jealously retained as heirlooms, and handed down from father to son after the fashion of entailed estates.

The last and most notable act in the



PRINCE OF WALES SOUND.

drama of war of which Hudson's Bay formed the theater was the capture of Fort Prince of Wales, in 1782, by the famous French admiral, La Pérouse. This splendid structure, which took twenty-five years to build, was intended to guard the entrance to Churchill Harbor. It was about four hundred feet square, with masonry walls six feet thick and twenty feet high, and the black muzzles of forty-two cannon thrust themselves threateningly through its entrance. Yet, when La Pérouse appeared before it in a seventy-four, accompanied by two frigates, and summoned it to yield, Governor Hearne, evidently deeming discretion the better part of valor, lowered the British flag, that had been floating proudly in the breeze, and replaced it with a table-cloth in token of complete surrender. The conqueror spiked the cannon, partially destroyed the walls, and sailed away with the garrison as prisoners of war. The damage done by him was never repaired, and the old fort stands to-day, probably the most imposing ruin of the kind on the continent, with the guns that were never fired still rusting upon the ramparts, and cannon-balls, balked of their mission, strewing the interior.

One would naturally expect that, so soon as they had obtained a firm foothold on the shore of Hudson's Bay, the

officials of the company would seek to penetrate into the vast region stretching out indefinitely to the west and south, from which the Indians, with whom they dealt, drew their supplies of precious peltries. But such was not the case; on the contrary, they were very slow to venture away from the sight of the sea, although the managers in England were most anxious for them to push inland, offering special rewards to those who should take part in such expeditions, and pensions to the widows of all whose lives might pay forfeit for their enterprise. The men themselves were not so much to blame for this inaction as the organization of the company. It was, as Father Drummond shrewdly indicates, too wooden, too much on the London counting-house plan. There was no spontaneity, no adjusting of means to an altered environment, nothing of what Parkman calls "that pliant and plastic temper which, in the French, forms so marked a contrast to the stubborn spirit of the Englishman." With a view to isolating their officials, the company forbade them entering an Indian lodge. At least one man was flogged for lighting his pipe at an Indian's tent. The factors feared the interior as a land of unknown danger. Terrible stories were circulated, to keep up a dread of the Indians and the French. Minute instruc-

tions were given to the men to protect themselves, especially in the winter. Scouts were to reconnoiter every day, and did they not return by nightfall, everything was to be got ready for a siege. At all times the cannon were to be in order, and all obstructions that might impede the view from the fort were to be cleared away.

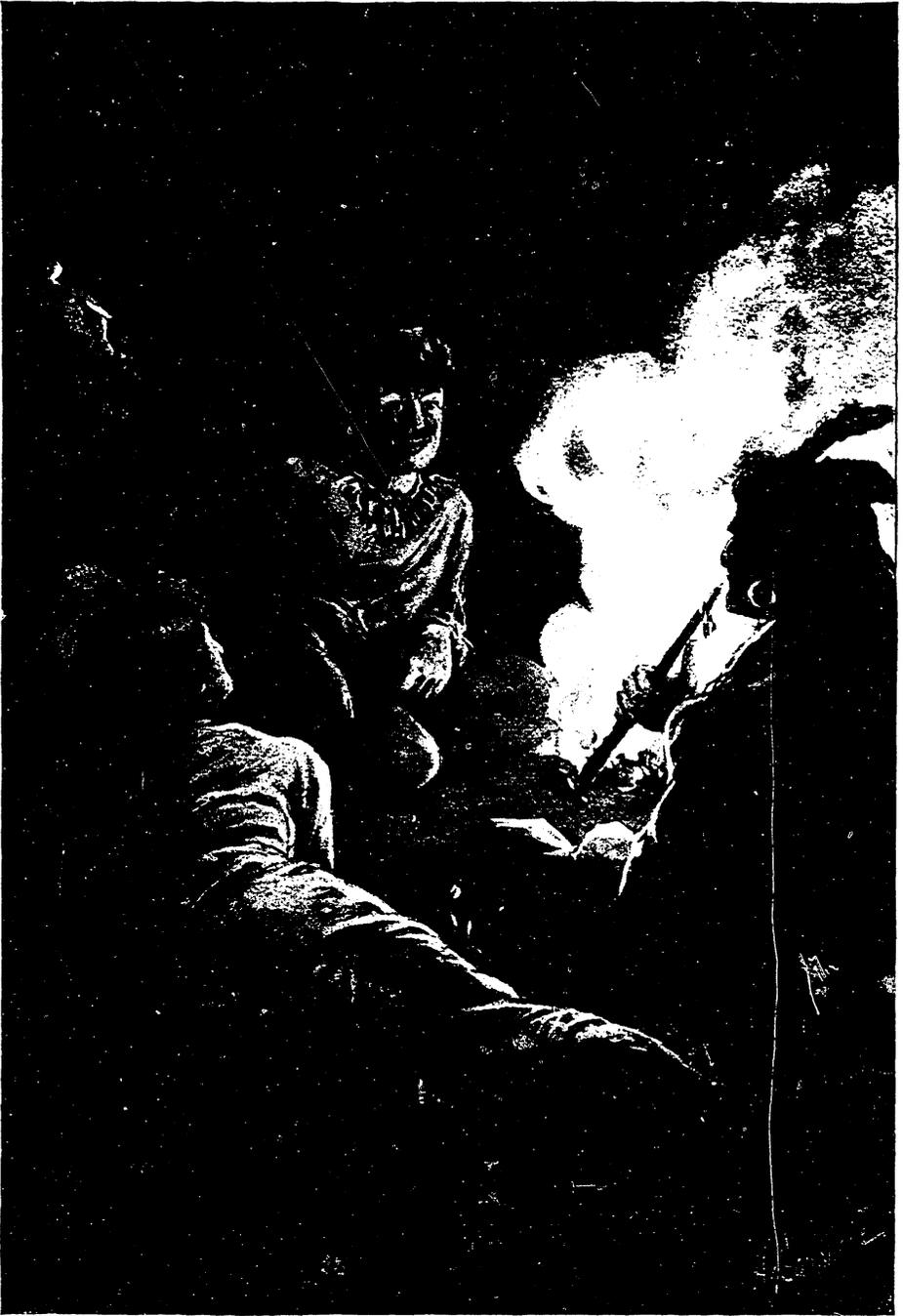
Hampered by these restrictions, which were as unnecessary as they were burdensome, the officials naturally enough preferred the comfortable, if commonplace, life at the forts to the discomforts, difficulties, and dangers inseparable from expeditions into the interior. Thus it came about that more than a century elapsed before they first made their way into the Red River region, which subsequently became the center of their operations. But, in the mean time, the French Canadians were showing a far different spirit. Knowing nothing about the exclusive privileges of the company, or caring less if they did happen to be informed, their *courcurs du bois*, following in the track of La Verandrye, year by year, in increasing numbers, set out from Montreal, ascended the Ottawa, made their way by portage, lake, and stream to Lake Nipissing, thence into the greater Lake Huron, across that inland ocean, Lake Superior, to its farthest shore, where the Kaminitiquia was entered, and the voyage continued through Lac la Pluie (Rainy Lake) and river, over Lac du Bois (Lake of the Woods), and down the River Quinipique (Winnipeg) into the lake of the same name; thus reaching the borders of the fertile prairies, where the buffalo took the place of the deer, and which rolled away in billows of verdure until they broke at the base of the Rocky Mountains, where the terrible grizzly met the trappers with fearless front.

These *courcurs du bois* were perfectly adapted for their business. They always maintained the best of terms with the Indians. They treated them as their equals. "With that light-hearted bravery and cheerful fortitude so common among the descendants of the French," writes one of their eulogists, "they sought out the savage in his wigwam. They often spent the whole winter with him, bearing wit' all his rudeness and caprices, and winning their way to his heart before they

asked for his furs. Quick to learn the Indian languages and the tricks of Indian life, fertile in expedients, they were loyal and warm-hearted to the core. They were not mere calculating-machines or animated money-bags. Instead of waiting for the savage, they met him on his own ground, and began by making him presents of trinkets and tobacco, and not until they had him in good-humor did they broach the question of trade."

Naturally enough, the Indian very much preferred dealing with these fascinating fellows, who came right to his wigwam, to traveling away up to the Hudson's Bay fort, where he would be stiffly received by an official who spoke to him through a barred window, and whose manner seemed to say: "Be off as soon as you are fleeced," and the consequence was that the pick of the peltry found its way into the hands of the French, and went by the overland route to Montreal, while only the beaver and otter skins got up to Hudson's Bay. It was not long before the managers of the company realized that this state of things must not be permitted to continue, and again and again we find the General Court writing to the factors and urging upon them the necessity of securing other furs than beaver and otter. In response to these repeated demands, the factors sought to extend the sphere of their operations by establishing forts farther inland. As, year by year, they thus made their way to the south and west, it could only be a question of time when they must encounter the ever-increasing stream of expeditions which had their source in Montreal; and the first meeting did take place in the year 1774 at Fort Cumberland, on the Saskatchewan River. "In that year," says Professor Bryce, "the two rival currents of trade, Canadian and English, met in the far northwest, and the struggle between them began, which for well-nigh fifty years went unceasingly on, now in dangerous eddy, then in boiling whirlpool, till at length as one stream they flowed on together in one course."

The struggle thus referred to forms the most exciting portion of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at the same time the portion concerning which, owing to the bewildering variety of contradictory evidence, it is most difficult to arrive at clear and satisfactory conclu-



A COUREUR DU BOIS.

sions. The company, of course, looked upon the Canadian traders as unauthorized invaders of its territory, for the bulk of the furs they secured were undoubtedly obtained from Indians whose hunting grounds came within the terms of the

company's charter. Not only so, but these intruders were guilty of intercepting Indians on their way to the forts; and, what made the matter worse, the furs the red man bore were already pledged to the company for advances made them. Now, the Hudson's Bay officials were not the men to endure this sort of thing in silence. For the most part they were Scotchmen of the sturdiest type, and the aggressions of the Canadians, Scotch though many of them were, also, aroused in them an angry spirit which could lead but in one direction. Sooner or later the matter must resolve itself into a question of force, and in the mean time they were ready to say with Wordsworth that

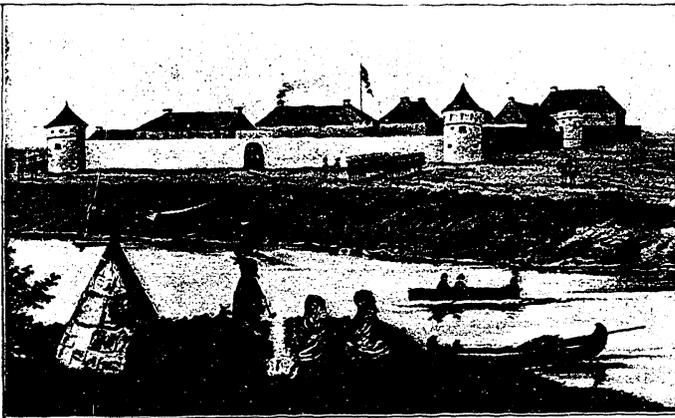
". . . the good old rule  
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,  
That they should take who have the power,  
And they should keep who can."

It would appear that the Canadians disputed the right of the company to exercise any monopoly in the northwest, and in proportion to the weakness of their position were strong in its reiteration. It seems equally clear that from the first they did not hesitate to resort to violence and intimidation in order to gain their ends. But the worst feature of all was their introduction of fire-water into these territories, which hitherto had known nothing of humanity's chief curse. Owing to the advantages of its position, the company was able to offer higher prices to the Indians than its rivals could, and, in order the better to obtain and retain control of the poor red man, the latter resorted to the importation of

spirits, for which he at once manifested the frantic passion that was lying dormant awaiting the advent of the tempter. It had been from the first a leading principle of the company that no spirits should on any account be sold to the Indians, and it is one of the brightest leaves in their laurels that their officials so long adhered to this in spite of many temptations.

Close upon the introduction of the accursed fire-water into their dealings the elements of violence and bloodshed, hitherto happily unknown, began to manifest themselves between the red man and his white brother. The most daring and turbulent spirits were now attracted to the Canadian fur trade, and if we follow Professor Bryce, the chief qualities sought in those sent out from Montreal were a love of violence and a thorough hatred of the Hudson's Bay Company. They were not long, however, in finding out their folly in resorting to strong drink as a means of increasing their trade, for while it did undoubtedly give them a temporary advantage over the company, retribution followed fast. In the year 1780, at Eagle Hills, on the Saskatchewan, the rendezvous of the Montreal traders, a liberal allowance of grog was bestowed upon a large band of Indians, and one of the traders, who had had some trouble with a chief, put a big dose of laudanum into his glass by way of subduing his aggressiveness. The experiment proved a complete success in that regard, for the Indian never awakened from the drunken stupor into which

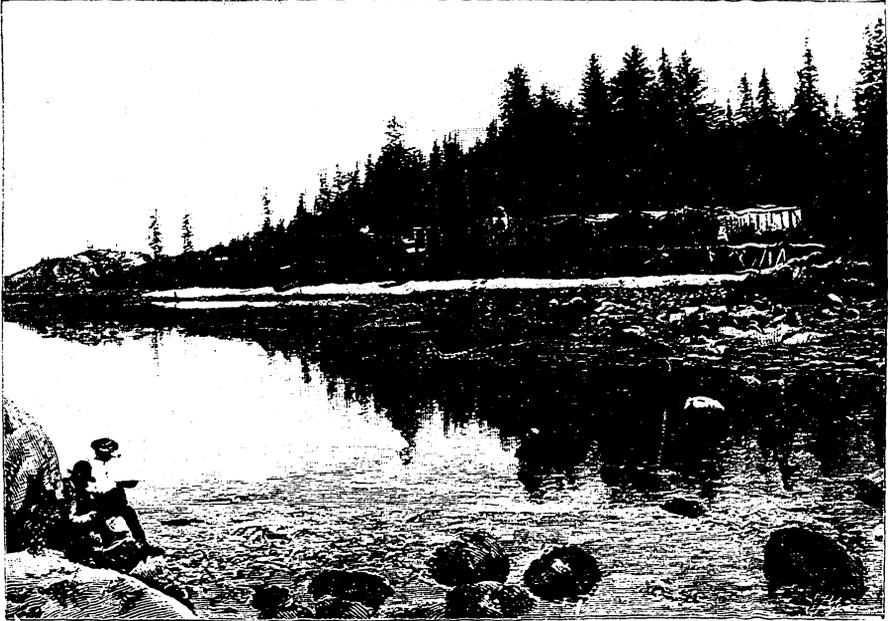
he immediately fell. But his friends and followers, not appreciating the situation, arose in their wrath, attacked the camp, killed the offending trader as well as several of the men, and sent the survivors flying for their lives, leaving a fine collection of valuable furs behind. A little later, two posts on the Assiniboine River were attacked



FORT GARRY, 1871.

and a number of traders and Indians slain in the struggle. These lamentable events were but the beginning of sorrows. Thenceforth, matters went from bad to worse, until at length the business be-

powerful and well-intrenched was the company that only an organization of corresponding magnitude and resources could hope to successfully cope with it. From this necessity sprang, in the year



MAMELELEAKE VILLAGE.

came utterly disorganized, and the traders bankrupt in purse and morals alike.

In the mean time the company had not been slow in defending its interests. It was not according to human nature that its sturdy Scotchmen should remain indifferent spectators of unscrupulous endeavors to cut the ground from under their feet. They had already shown their ability to protect their interests by more than one device. By fomenting divisions and animosities among the Indian tribes in the interior they had made it difficult and dangerous for any one but themselves to trade with them. They had even gone so far upon one occasion as to seize and drive ashore two ships that had ventured into Hudson's Bay on a trading expedition, pleading in extenuation that the vessels were lost through stress of weather. And now they bent all their energies to the task of opposing, hindering, and ruining the petty rivals who had the presumption to encroach upon their domain. The latter soon realized the necessity of combination if they would not be driven out. So

1783, the famous Northwest Fur Company of Montreal, which, beginning with a mere partnership of the principal merchants engaged in the fur trade, developed with astonishing growth until it positively overshadowed its elder rival. The method of the Hudson's Bay Company was to pay its employes simply by salary, but the new company introduced a better system—every officer had before him the immense inducement of a probable partnership, for thus were the faithful and energetic ones by due process of promotion rewarded. This masterly policy kept every man up to the high-water mark of his abilities, and the result was that in a few years from the inception of this enterprise the annual profits had reached the splendid figure of forty thousand pounds, while ten years later they were three times that amount. The conservative old H. B. Company was astonished at the magnificence of the new-comers, and old traders yet talk of the lordly "Northwester." Washington Irving, who was a guest of the company in the height of its prosper-

ity, has given us a characteristically graphic record of his impressions.

The principal partners, who resided in Montreal and Quebec, formed a kind of commercial aristocracy, living in lordly and hospitable style. Their only associations were clerks at the remote trading-posts; and the pleasures, dangers, adventures, and mishaps which they had shared together in their wild-wood life had linked them heartily to each other, so that they formed a convivial fraternity. Few travelers that have visited Canada in the days of the McTavishes, the McGillivrays, the McKenzies, the Frobishers, and the other magnates of the Northwest, when the company was in all its glory, but must remember the round of feasting and revelry kept up among the hyperborean nabobs.

Sometimes one or two partners, recently from the interior posts, would make their appearance in New York, in the course of a tour of pleasure and curiosity. On these occasions there was always a degree of magnificence of the purse about them, and a peculiar propensity to expenditure at the goldsmiths and jewelers for rings, chains, brooches, watches, and other rich trinkets—a gorgeous prodigality such as was often to be noticed in former times in Southern planters and West India creoles, when flush with the profits of their plantations.

To behold the Northwest Company in all its state and grandeur, however, 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 of 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 and the *coureurs du bois*, for now the aristocratic 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 dependants as of himself. To him a visit to the grand conference at Fort William was a most important event, and he repaired thither 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. Indeed, the partners from below considered the whole dignity of the company as represented in their persons, and conducted themselves in suitable style. They ascended the river in great state, like sovereigns making a progress. They were wrapped in red furs, their huge canoes freighted with every convenience and luxury, and manned by Canadian voyageurs as obedient as Highland clansmen. They carried with them their cooks and barbers, together with delicacies of every kind, and abundance of choice wines for the banquets which attended this convocation. Happy were they, too, if they could have

some distinguished strangers—above all, some member of the British nobility—to grace their high solemnities.

Fort William, the scene of this important annual meeting, was a considerable village on the farther shore of Lake Superior.

(To be concluded.)



A RED RIVER CART.

Jan 10 1860



FORT DUNVEGAN, ATHABASCA.

## THE ROMANTIC STORY OF A GREAT CORPORATION.

(THE HUDSON'S BAY TRADING COMPANY.)—PART II. (*Conclusion.*)

BY J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

AS I have already pointed out, the Hudson's Bay Company was slow in extending its operations beyond the region directly tributary to the bay, and its officials seemed to prefer that the Indians should come to them instead of their going out to seek the Indians. But now the Nor-Westers pushed away north and west until they not only touched the feet of the Rocky Mountains, but fearlessly scaled that mighty barrier, and floated upon the waters of the Peace River. At the first they met with no active opposition from their older rivals, and it is possible that the two organizations might never have come into active conflict but for a series of events, not directly connected with the fur trade, which precipitated the struggle. Lord Selkirk was a philanthropic Scotch nobleman, whose kind heart was stirred to its depths by the woes of his fellow-countrymen at the times of the "Highland clearances," and he determined to devote his resources to finding for some of them, at least, the opportunity in the New World across the Atlantic "to redress the balance of the Old." He had heard of the wonderful prairies of the North-West, waiting only to be tickled with the hoe to make them laugh into abundant harvests; and after planting a successful colony in Prince Edward Island, he forwarded another instalment of emigrants, *via* Hudson's

Bay, to the plains of the Red River, establishing a colony there, which in later years became the nucleus of a new province.

The North-West Company at once took alarm. It wanted those fertile plains preserved as hunting-grounds, and did not relish the idea of their being populated by the overflowing thousands of Great Britain. Every possible obstacle was placed in the way of the colonists. Intimidation, and even violence, were resorted to, and the lives of the poor emigrants filled with terror. This conduct strongly incensed the good earl against the new company, and, to enable him the better to punish them, he bought all the Hudson's Bay Company's stock he could obtain, until, holding some forty thousand pounds' worth out of a capital of one hundred and five thousand pounds, he had the controlling interest. At once he began to exert himself against the obnoxious Nor-Westers. Rousing up the Hudson Bays from their lethargy he instituted a vigorous competition. Wherever the former established a fort, the latter built another near by. Every method which artifice, fraud, or even violence could suggest was adopted, to outwit each other and to obtain the furs of the Indians, who did not care what company got their furs so long as they were well paid for them. Ballantyne re-

lates some amusing stories of the ruses resorted to by the rivals.

On one occasion, the Hudson's Bay scouts reported the approach of a band of Indians returning from a hunting expedition. No sooner was this heard than a grand ball was given to the Nor-Westerns. Great preparations were made for it, and a royal time was had. But while the revelers were tripping the light fantastic toe to the music of Scotch reels and strathspeys, a score of earnest men were busily at work in a secluded spot, packing sledges with goods and preparing for a journey. Soon they start off silently, no tinkling of bells, no cracking of whips, no shouts to the dogs, as they disappear into the darkness, while the ball goes merrily on. The following day the Nor-West scouts report the same party of Indians, and as quickly as possible a set of sleighs depart from *their* fort with loudly ringing bells. After a long march of forty miles they reach the encampment, only to find all the Indians gloriously drunk, and not a single skin, not even the tail of a musquash, to repay them for their trouble. Then it was that they perceived the true inwardness of the ball, and vowed to have their revenge.

Opportunity was not long wanting. Soon after this, one of their parties encountered a Hudson's Bay train on its way to trade with the same Indians of whom they were in search. They exchanged compliments with each other, and as the day was very cold, proposed lighting a fire, and having something to drink together. A huge fire was soon roaring in their midst, the canteens were produced, and they each tried who could tell the biggest yarns while the good liquor mounted to their brains. The Nor-Westerns, after a little time, spilled their grog on the snow, unperceived by the others, so that they kept fairly sober, although their rivals were becoming very much elevated. At last they began boasting of their superior prowess in drinking, and in proof thereof each of them swallowed a big bumper. The Hudson Bays, not to be outdone, followed their example, and almost instantly fell over upon the snow helplessly drunk. In ten minutes more they were tied firmly upon their sledges, and the dogs being turned homewards, away they went straight for the Hudson's

Bay fort, where in due time they safely arrived with the men still sound asleep, while the Nor-Westerns made haste for the Indian camp, and this time had the furs all to themselves.

But such convivial and friendly devices to outwit each other soon gave way to more reprehensible proceedings. As the competition grew keener the temper of the rivals waxed hotter, and, ere long, forts were attacked, taken, and burnt, the officials and their adherents imprisoned and harshly treated, the furs, on their way to the rendezvous, intercepted, and appropriated by main strength, if necessary, and the whole trade turned into a furious conflict. The Governor-General of Canada sent out warrants and proclamations, in vain. These were alike treated with sovereign contempt in that distant land, where "the king's writ runneth not;" for both sides well knew that he had no means of putting his high-sounding words into action. So matters went from bad to worse until, in the year 1816, they reached a climax in a battle royal, which took place before the gates of Fort Garry, the Hudson Bays' principal post in the Red River region, and in which lamentable affair seventeen men and three officers of the company, including Governor Semple, fell, pierced with bullets.

Yet even this dreadful occurrence did not at once abate the conflict. All parley was now at an end, and the password was "war to the knife." Officers and men were engaged by the companies, principally with a view to their fighting qualities, and more interest was taken in a successful encounter than in a profitable barter. Such a state of affairs could not long continue. The whole trade was being ruined, the Indians were becoming demoralized with fire-water, the prices paid for the peltries were out of all proportion to the value. The cooler heads of the concern then saw their opportunity, and negotiations were entered into, which, in 1821, resulted in their giving up conflict for coalition, and being united, with the approval of Parliament, under the name of the older company, some additional privileges being granted at the same time. Soon after the coalition, a shrewd young Scotchman, who had been sent out from London to examine the condition of things, showed such aptitude for business



BRINGING FURS TO THE FORT.

and such fertility of resource that he was put at the head of affairs in North America, with the title of Governor-in-Chief of

Rupert's Land. "It was a great responsibility," writes Professor Bryce, "for young and inexperienced George Simp-



FORT GARRY, RED RIVER.

son to undertake the management of so great a concern, to reconcile men who had been in arms against each other, and to bring their trade from the brink of ruin to a successful issue. Yet for forty years he remained at the helm, and with such marked success as to have the honor of knight-hood conferred upon him, in token of his services. He was the virtual ruler of about half of North America, and, though an autocrat, held the reins of power to the last with unslackening grasp. Small in stature, he was of indomitable perseverance, albeit somewhat impatient in temper. It is told of him—and one may say of the story '*si non é vero*;' it is at least '*ben trovato*'—that, on one occasion, while passing through the Lake of the Woods, and urging his crew overmuch, a powerful French voyageur, his right-hand man, became so incensed at his unreasoning demands that he seized him by the neck, lifted him over the gunwale, plunged him into the water, and then drew him dripping in again, to be, for the re-

mainder of that voyage, a more considerate master."

Under Sir George Simpson's sway, the story of the company was one of peace, prosperity, and progress. The infusion of North-West blood and capital gave it most vigorous life, and each year witnessed extending operations, until, in 1860, its ledger showed one hundred and fifty-five establishments, in charge of twenty-five chief factors, twenty-eight chief traders, one hundred and fifty-two clerks, and one thousand two hundred other servants, besides a legion of subject natives. The trading districts were divided into four departments, covering the country from ocean to ocean, from Ungava, on the bleak Labrador coast, to Fort Victoria, on the fiord-pierced shores of British Columbia—an empire hardly smaller than the whole of Europe, though but thinly populated by some one hundred and sixty thousand Indians, half-breeds, and Esquimaux.

Hardly was the Dominion of Canada well born than its statesmen began to look with longing eyes upon the boundless prairies of the North-West, and to demand in no uncertain language from the mother country the abrogation of the charter giving the Hudson's Bay Company a monopoly of that promised land. But, of course, the company could hardly be expected to yield up so splendid a property without adequate compensation. Negotiations were accordingly entered into, which, in the year 1869, resulted in a bargain being effected. The company surrendered its proprietary rights, and in return therefor received the tidy sum of three hundred thousand pounds sterling, and one-twentieth of the land within the fertile belt, as well as fifty thousand acres in immediate proximity to its posts.

As a monopoly the Hudson's Bay Company then ceased to exist. As a commercial corporation, trading upon just the same basis as other corporations, and still practically free from troublesome competition in the more northern territories, holding vast landed estates, ever increasing in value as the country opens up, and able to pay a decent dividend, capital now swollen to two millions of pounds, the "Honorable Company of Merchant Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay"

has still, no doubt, in store for it a prolonged if uneventful future.

The headquarters of the company continue to be in Fenchurch Street, London, but the recent election to the chief-governorship of Sir Donald Smith, of Montreal, whose life for the past half-century has been part of the company's history, has brought the control of affairs into closer touch with the country, and made it seem more than ever in the past a national enterprise.

I have thus sketched in scanty outline the romantic history of the great corporation, and it now remains for me to give some picture of its internal workings, of its method of dealing with the Indians, and of life at the hundred or more forts scattered throughout so many thousand miles of varied territory.

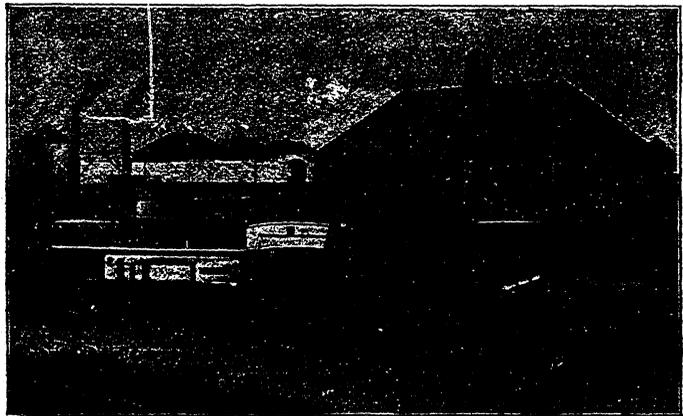
Regarded strictly as a fur-trading enterprise, the Hudson's Bay Company reached its zenith about the year 1868, just before the surrender of its proprietary privileges to the Dominion of Canada; and as the methods and manners in vogue then remain practically unchanged to-day at the more distant forts, whither settlement and civilization have not yet made their way, I will ask my readers to imagine themselves transported to a typical post of that period, and interested spectators of its picturesque, unconventional life.

If, on approaching a Hudson's Bay post for the first time, you had the high-sounding word "fort," suggestive of rampart, bastion, embrasure, and battlement, much upon your mind, and were accordingly full of appropriate expectation, you would be doomed to disappointment. Excepting Fort Garry, which, before the city of Winnipeg swallowed it up, was really a fortress with substantial stone walls and towers, the forts are quite unimposing affairs. Fancy a parallelogram of greater or less extent, according to the importance of the post, inclosed

by a picket twenty-four feet in height, composed of upright trunks, and fastened along the top by a strong rail. At each corner stands a stout bastion built of squared logs, and pierced for guns commanding both sides of the angle. Inside the picket is a gallery running right around the inclosure, just high enough for a man's head to be level with the top of the fence. At intervals along the side of the picket are loopholes for rifles, and over the gateway frowns another bastion, from which anybody attempting to storm the gate may be warmly peppered. In the center of the space inclosed are the houses of the factor, or trader in charge, and his chief subordinates, while ranged around the sides, close to the stockade, are the trading store, the fur-room, the warehouses, servants' quarters, etc. Beside the factor's residence rises a lofty flagstaff from which floats the flag of the company, bearing its motto: "Pro Pelle Cutem," and near by stands a bell tower which sounds out the important hours of the day.

In the earlier days one of the garrison would, watch by watch, pace round the gallery, crying out at intervals the hours and the state of the weather; partly as a precaution against Indian invasion, and partly as a fire patrol; but the establishment of the mounted police by the Dominion Government has rendered the former duty unnecessary, and the practice is now almost obsolete.

The advent of a band of Indians, burdened with the result of a season's hunting, arouses the fort from its humdrum



LANDING AT FORT GARRY.

routine, and it becomes a scene of picturesque animation and bustle. If the band be an important one, its coming has been announced by a couple of braves sent on ahead as advance agents, and everything is in readiness. This means not only that the company's goods are ready for the barter, but that every precaution has been taken to guard against a sudden reconnaissance in force on the part of the red men, whose feelings are apt to be powerfully operated upon by the knowledge that what seems to them illimitable wealth is kept out of their grasp by only some rough wooden walls, and a handful of white men. The manner in which the business of bartering goods for peltries is then conducted has been graphically described for us by a writer familiar with the proceedings. The Indian with his bundle of furs proceeds in the first instance to the trading-room, where the trader separates the furs into lots, puts a valuation upon them according to their kind and quality, and, after adding up the amount, returns to the Indian a number of little pieces of wood indicating the number of "made-beavers" to which his "hunt" amounts. Bearing his bundle of sticks, the happy hunter then proceeds to the store-room, where he finds himself surrounded by bales of blankets, slop-coats, guns, scalping-knives, tomahawks, powder-horns, axes, etc., etc., and is thereby made to feel very much like a hungry boy let loose in a pastry-cook's, and would without doubt behave in a much similar fashion if he dared. Each article has a recognized value in "made-beaver." A slop-coat, for example, may be worth five "made-beavers," and the aborigine pays for his civilized finery with twelve of his sticks; for a gun he gives twenty; for a knife two; and so on until his stock of wooden "legal tender" is exhausted, when, with profound regret and longing eyes, he retires to make room for the next comer, and to proudly exhibit his purchases to his friends and family.

At every post, or at least in every district, there is a tariff established which varies little from year to year. The mind of the Indian, untutored to the rise and fall of the markets, and knowing nothing of what it means for furs to be "firm" or "unsteady," is not tolerant of

varying prices; and accordingly, to facilitate matters, the company takes the risk of changes, and unless the fall in price is of long continuance, gives the same price for fur as formerly when it was high, or *vice versa*; thus on some peltries the company loses, but compensates itself by making a large profit upon others. This system has one advantage. The Indian never attempts to raise the price of furs or beat down the price of the merchandise. The tariff is unchangeable. If he is not pleased with it he is at perfect liberty to go to the next shop, and this, combined with the fact that the company sells nothing which is not of the best quality of its kind, has given it advantage over all competitors that it will be long in losing.

Before the establishment of the mounted police the posts in the plain country, at which the wily, unscrupulous Black-foot and Crees were the principal customers, had to take many precautions when a large band of redskins came to trade. Guns were loaded and placed in the loopholes commanding the Indian and trade rooms, and the gates of the stockade securely fastened. All communication between the Indians and trader was cut off, and there remained for the customers only the narrow passage leading from the outer gate of the stockade to the Indian room, the Indian room itself, and the narrow hallway between it and the trade-room. This latter was furnished with two heavy doors, with a space between them which would hold from two to four Indians. Only two Indians were admitted at a time into the trade-room. This was divided by a stout partition reaching from floor to ceiling, in the center of which an aperture about a yard square was cut, and divided by a grating into squares sufficiently large to admit of the easy passage of goods, but not of the red man in person. As a still further precaution the passage leading to the window was in some instances made crooked, for the very good reason that experience had taught the trader that the Indian was apt to bring heated bargaining to a dramatic climax by shooting him from behind.

There has been a wonderful change in values since the good old days in the early part of this century. When Fort Dunvegan was established on the Peace

River, near the Rockies, the regular price of a trade musket was Rocky Mountain sables piled up on each side until they were level with its muzzle when held upright. Now these sables were worth in England about three pounds apiece, while the cost of the musket did not exceed one pound. The price of a six-shilling blanket was, in like manner, thirteen beavers of the best quality, beaver then being worth thirty-two shillings a pound, and a good skin weighing a pound or more.

But in the course of time the Indians began to know better the relative value of the muskets and their furs, and to object most decidedly to the one being piled along the barrel of the other, which report sayeth was lengthened year by year until it attained colossal dimensions,

Indians should confine their exertions to the more valuable creatures, and thereby kill the goose of the golden eggs. Furthermore, the company has always exercised a sort of paternal care over the people that might, in some sense, be regarded as its wards. Liberal advances are never refused to trusty trappers in case of need, and to the credit of the red men be it recorded that rarely are these obligations evaded, the company's experience being that in this respect the redskin can set an example well worthy of imitation by his pale-faced brother. And finally, when the Indian grows too old to trap and hunt as of yore, he is allowed to become a pensioner upon the company's bounty, and there is hardly a fort that has not a number of such hangers-on. The best possible reply



FORT EDMONTON, ALBERTA.

so that the trade gradually became to be less jug-handled.

The company has shown no less farsightedness than humanity in its dealings with the ignorant Indians, to so large an extent in its power. Its laudable position with regard to the use of spirits in trade has been already mentioned, and although, during the disastrous rivalry with the Nor-Westers, the Hudson's Bay did, for a time, fall away from grace, and fight fire-water with fire-water, so soon as the struggle ended in coalition prohibition once more prevailed. Then every care has been taken to prevent the extermination of the fur-bearing animals, and whole districts have been "laid over" from hunting for years at a time. Another sagacious principle was to pay a proportionately higher price for inferior furs, such as musk-rats, lest the

that can be given to those who have made it their business to abuse the company for alleged ill-treatment of the Indians, is to be found in the fact that to this day the company is looked upon with the utmost affection and veneration by them. The writer already quoted relates that often, when he complained that the Indians charged him for any services rendered much more than they would have charged the company, he was met with the conclusive answer, "Yes, I know we do; but if you took care of us in our old age, and treated us as well as they have treated us, then we would do this for you at the same price."

Lieutenant Gordon, who was in command of the three expeditions dispatched by the Marine Department of Canada into Hudson's Bay for the purpose of determining the possibilities of that inland



A DOG TRAIN.

ocean as a highway of commerce, was much struck by the fact that the officials at all the posts he visited with singular unanimity told the same story, viz. : that there was no profit being made upon their transactions, but that the posts were maintained simply for the benefit of the Indians and Esquimaux. The shrewd sailor did not feel bound to accept the statement unreservedly, but no doubt it had enough truth to ballast it, for the profits of fur-trading have wofully fallen off within the past quarter of a century, and there is little hope of their ever regaining their former figures.

But, so far, I have said little or nothing about the officials, and they certainly deserve a good part of an article to themselves. As already indicated, the majority of those at the posts have, from the first, been Scotchmen, although of recent years many from England and Canada have entered into the service of the company.

The grades of rank are very distinctly marked, and an effective, if not martial, discipline is still maintained. The various officials of the company are classed as follows, beginning at the top and working downward: Highest of all are the governor, deputy-governor, and board of directors, who reside in London, and form the court of last resort as regards the direction of their affairs. As mentioned in the first part of this article, the governor is, for the first time in the history of the company, a Canadian, Sir Donald Smith, of Montreal, now filling that honorable office. The staff of offi-

cialis in Canada is made up as follows. There are two commissioners, one in charge of the land sales and one of the fur trade, and known as the land and trade commissioners respectively. Then comes the inspecting chief factor, having three shares in the stock of the

company to his credit, as a reward for long and faithful service; then the chief traders, ruling over districts or departments, and holding two and a half shares; next the factors, who are in charge of important posts, and have two shares; below them the chief traders, with one and a half shares; and below them again the junior chief traders, who, having put in at least fourteen years of satisfactory service, are promoted from the rank of clerks, and given an interest in the company to the extent of a single share. The apprenticed clerks, the largest body of all, bring up the rear. They are sturdy young men, ranging in age from fifteen to thirty, and upon them falls the hardest and most important work. Next below the apprenticed clerks comes the postmaster, usually a promoted laborer, who, for good behavior or valuable service, has been put on a footing with the gentlemen of the service, in the same manner that a private soldier in the army is sometimes raised to the rank of commissioned officer. Still lower are the interpreters, who, for the most part, are intelligent laborers of long standing, that have taken the trouble to familiarize themselves with the various Indian dialects, and thereby become indispensable in conducting negotiations with the natives. Finally, at the bottom of all are the voyageurs, hunters, and laborers, whose duties are as multifarious as they are laborious, cutting fire-wood and shoveling snow in winter, rowing, paddling, and portaging boats and canoes with their

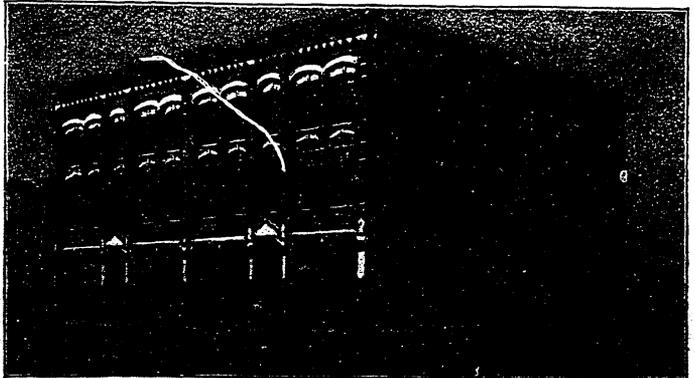
heavy cargoes in summer, and otherwise making themselves generally useful.

Life at a Hudson's Bay post nowadays is at best a rather dull and humdrum affair. The Indians are entirely under control, and no more a source of danger than the negroes in the South; and time is apt to hang heavily upon the hands of the garrison, which may consist of from two to half a hundred men—according to whether the post is a central depot of supplies, a permanent fort, or merely an isolated stockade for the accumulation of provisions and peltries for the use of larger forts. But whatever may be the character of the establishment, a certain amount of discipline is carefully maintained, and an observer could hardly fail to be struck with the prompt obedience shown to some mere stripling of a clerk by the grizzled, weather-beaten voyageurs and laborers under his control.

The day begins with breakfast, which is usually at six o'clock in winter, and an hour earlier in summer, although the higher officials may prolong their morning nap a little, if they feel inclined. There is an officers' mess and a servants' mess, the latter drawing rations at regular intervals, and having them cooked by one of their number set apart for the purpose. The officers by no means regard lightly the pleasures of the table, and great care is taken to keep the larder well stocked. Their fare is, of course, confined largely to such wild game and fish as the country round about affords, but the supply is abundant, and the variety extensive. Buffalo hump—now, alas, little more than a tender, juicy memory—moose-muffie—tremulous and opaque as a vegetable conserve—beaver tail, unctuous and satisfying, venison haunch and savory duck, crimson salmon and snowy whitefish—one does not soon tire of such viands as these, especially when they are prepared by French cooks. The hours of business at the forts dur-

ing the summer season are from nine to six, with a break at noonday for dinner; and if the post be an important one, there is plenty of animation and bustle, but no undue haste, a careful attention to details being never forgotten. The Indians, in bands upon horseback, or singly upon foot, present themselves with furs to trade. The voyageurs are hard at work loading with bales of costly furs the boats lying in the river, or unloading them of the goods they have brought. Brigades of boats destined for more distant points pause for a few days or hours to exchange the news, and take a little breathing-spell; while now and then the arrival of the district inspector, or some other important official, with his train of servants, creates a sensation that only subsides with his departure for another station.

All summer long a Hudson's Bay officer's lot is rather a happy one, which many a cribbed, cabined, and confined city dweller might envy; for in the intervals of work there are hunting, fishing, boating, swimming, and other athletic pursuits to be enjoyed in the finest climate in the world. It is when the long winter comes, and the whole world around is buried beneath a fall of snow from three to thirty feet deep, that the utmost ingenuity is needed to drive dull *ennui* away. The cold is intense yet not unbearable, owing to the dryness of the atmosphere. Not a step can be taken except on snow-shoes. A silence as of death has fallen upon nature; not a bird sings in the leafless trees, not a creature stirs within the range of vision; "the waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen;" and the warm, cozy mess-room of the fort possesses



WAREHOUSE OF HUDSON'S BAY TRADING COMPANY.

attractions not so evident in the glorious days of midsummer. Then are the men thrown upon their own resources for entertainment, and whether the hours pass brightly or heavily will depend upon themselves. There is very little work to be done. The furs have to be sorted, locked to frequently, and packed in readiness for the coming of spring; and visits may be exchanged with the nearest fort. Those who like to dabble in ink have now a fine opportunity to write up their diaries; and others, with a taste for natural history, can amuse themselves in mounting and preserving specimens; while the studiously inclined can follow their favorite lines of study.

The northern mail starts out from Winnipeg early in December. It consists of two or more toboggans drawn by dogs, and laden with strong wooden boxes in which is placed an astonishing amount of mail matter. Proceeding as far as possible along the frozen bosoms of the lakes and rivers, the train pushes northward at the rate of forty miles a day, the drivers on snow-shoes easily keeping pace with the well-broken dogs, of which four are harnessed to each toboggan, until Fort Carlton, in the Saskatchewan valley, is reached. Here the entire mail is overhauled and repacked, branch packets being sent off east and west, while the main packet continues ever northward over the snow-billowed plains, across the deep-drifted valleys, through the sighing, shadowy forests, diminishing steadily in bulk as fort after fort is visited, until at last, reduced to a mere handful, that a man might put in his pocket, it reaches the end of its journey at Fort Yukon, upon the far frontier of Alaska.

When the young clerk first went out to Rupert's Land, a wife, as a *compagnon de voyage*, was not to be considered; and then, when the time came that he might indulge in matrimony, he was far away from the women of his own race, few,

indeed, of whom would be willing to stake their future upon the uncertainty of finding such domestic happiness in the wilds of North America as would compensate them for the loss of all the delights of civilization. The natural consequence was that, looking about him for a companion, he found his choice limited to the dusky belles of the Indians. Sons and daughters were born, and grew up, to win the love that was rarely bestowed upon the patient, faithful drudge of a mother. The natural affection of the father proved stronger than the artificial laws of society, and the connection thus strongly cemented continued unbroken to the end. The company made a point of encouraging this mating of the Indian races with their officers and men. It insured the good-will of the one, and bound the other to the country by ties not readily broken. So the children came in quiversful to the Macs and Pierres, and the blood of redskin warriors mingling with that of "Hieland lairds" and French *bourgeois* went flowing forth in a steady stream all through the mighty possessions of the company.

It seems as though I had but scratched the surface of the story of this great corporation, which for more than two centuries has wielded so profound an influence throughout the northern half of this continent. It may endure for many decades or even for centuries yet, but its career cannot be less prosaic than that of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. The returns from sales of land already far overshadow the profits from the fur trade, and the latter must inevitably in time shrink into insignificance. However that may be, the "Honorable Company of Merchant Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay," looking back upon its records, may, with substantial reason, congratulate itself upon having contributed one of the most interesting chapters to the romance of commerce.



FORT ELLICE, MANITOBA.