

An aerial photograph of a coastline. The top of the image shows a range of mountains in a hazy, orange-brown light. Below the mountains, a large wave is breaking, creating a thick, white foam that stretches across the width of the image. The water below the wave is a deep, vibrant green, with some darker patches and white foam from smaller waves visible. The overall scene is dynamic and captures the power of the ocean.

Alexander Mackenzie

VOYAGES
FROM
MONTREAL
THROUGH
THE CONTINENT
OF
NORTH
AMERICA

(Vol. 1&2)

Alexander Mackenzie

Voyages from Montreal Through the Continent of North America (Vol. 1&2)

**Journey to the Arctic Ocean and the Pacific in
1789 and 1793**

e-artnow, 2021

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Preface.

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On presenting this Volume to my Country, it is not necessary to enter into a particular account of those voyages whose journals form the principal part of it, as they will be found, I trust, to explain themselves. It appears, however, to be a duty, which the Public have a right to expect from me, to state the reasons which have influenced me in delaying the publication of them.

It has been asserted, that a misunderstanding between a person high in office and myself, was the cause of this procrastination. It has also been propagated, that it was occasioned by that precaution which the policy of commerce will sometimes suggest; but they are both equally devoid of foundation. The one is an idle tale; and there could be no solid reason for concealing the circumstances of discoveries, whose arrangements and prosecution were so honourable to my associates and myself, at whose expense they were undertaken. The delay actually arose from the very active and busy mode of life in which I was engaged since the voyages have been completed; and when, at length, the opportunity arrived, the apprehension of presenting myself to the Public in the character of an Author, for which the courses and occupations of my life have by no means qualified me, made me hesitate in committing my papers to the Press; being much better calculated to perform the voyages, arduous as they might be, than to write an account of them. However, they are now offered to the Public with the submission that becomes me.

I was led, at an early period of life, by commercial views, to the country North-West of Lake Superior, in North America, and being endowed by Nature with an inquisitive mind and enterprising spirit; possessing also a constitution and frame of body equal to the most arduous undertakings, and being familiar with toilsome exertions in the prosecution of mercantile pursuits, I not only contemplated the practicability of penetrating across the continent of America, but was confident in the qualifications, as I was animated by the desire, to undertake the perilous enterprise.

The general utility of such a discovery, has been universally acknowledged; while the wishes of my particular friends and commercial associates, that I should proceed in the pursuit of it, contributed to quicken the execution of this favourite project of my own ambition: and as the completion of it extends the boundaries of geographic science, and adds new countries to the realms of British commerce, the dangers I have encountered, and the toils I have suffered, have found their recompence; nor will the many tedious and weary days, or the gloomy and inclement nights which I have passed, have been passed in vain.

The first voyage has settled the dubious point of a practicable North-West passage; and I trust it has set that long agitated question at rest, and extinguished the disputes respecting it for ever. An enlarged discussion of that subject will be found to occupy the concluding pages of this volume.

In this voyage, I was not only without the necessary books and instruments, but also felt myself deficient in the sciences of astronomy and navigation; I did not hesitate, therefore, to undertake a winter's voyage to this country, in order to procure the one, and acquire the other. These objects being accomplished, I returned, to determine the

practicability of a commercial communication through the continent of North America, between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, which is proved by my second journal. Nor do I hesitate to declare my decided opinion, that very great and essential advantages may be derived by extending our trade from one sea to the other.

Some account of the fur trade of Canada from that country, of the native inhabitants, and of the extensive districts connected with it, forms a preliminary discourse, which will, I trust, prove interesting to a nation, whose general policy is blended with, and whose prosperity is supported by, the pursuits of commerce. It will also qualify the reader to pursue the succeeding voyages with superior intelligence and satisfaction.

These voyages will not, I fear, afford the variety that may be expected from them; and that which they offered to the eye, is not of a nature to be effectually transferred to the page. Mountains and valleys, the dreary waste, and the wide-spreading forests, the lakes and rivers succeed each other in general description; and, except on the coasts of the Pacific Ocean, where the villages were permanent, and the inhabitants in a great measure stationary, small bands of wandering Indians are the only people whom I shall introduce to the acquaintance of my readers.

The beaver and the buffalo, the moose-deer and the elk, which are the principal animals to be found in these countries, are already so familiar to the naturalists of Europe, and have been so often as well as correctly described in their works, that the bare mention of them, as they enlivened the landscape, or were hunted for food; with a cursory account of the soil, the course and navigation of lakes and rivers, and their various produce, is all that can be reasonably expected from me.

I do not possess the science of the naturalist; and even if the qualifications of that character had been attained by me, its curious spirit would not have been gratified. I could not stop to dig into the earth, over whose surface I was compelled to pass with rapid steps; nor could I turn aside to collect the plants which nature might have scattered on the way, when my thoughts were anxiously employed in making provision for the day that was passing over me. I had to encounter perils by land and perils by water; to watch the savage who was our guide, or to guard against those of his tribe who might meditate our destruction. I had, also, the passions and fears of others to control and subdue. To-day, I had to assuage the rising discontents, and on the morrow, to cheer the fainting spirits of the people who accompanied me. The toil of our navigation was incessant, and oftentimes extreme; and in our progress over land, we had no protection from the severity of the elements, and possessed no accommodations or conveniences but such as could be contained in the burden on our shoulders, which aggravated the toils of our march, and added to the wearisomeness of our way.

Though the events which compose my journals may have little in themselves to strike the imagination of those who love to be astonished, or to gratify the curiosity of such as are enamoured of romantic adventures; nevertheless, when it is considered, that I explored those waters which had never before borne any other vessel than the canoe of the savage; and traversed those deserts where an European had never before presented himself to the eye of its swarthy natives; when to these considerations are added the important objects which were pursued, with the dangers that were encountered, and the difficulties that were surmounted to attain them, this work will, I flatter myself,

be found to excite an interest, and conciliate regard, in the minds of those who peruse it.

The general map which illustrates this volume, is reduced by Mr. Arrowsmith from his three-sheet map of North America, with the latest discoveries, which he is about to republish. His professional abilities are well known, and no encomium of mine will advance the general and merited opinion of them.

Before I conclude, I must beg leave to inform my readers, that they are not to expect the charms of embellished narrative, or animated description; the approbation due to simplicity and to truth, is all I presume to claim; and I am not without the hope that this claim will be allowed me. I have described whatever I saw with the impressions of the moment which presented it to me. The successive circumstances of my progress are related without exaggeration or display. I have seldom allowed myself to wander into conjecture; and whenever conjecture has been indulged, it will be found, I trust, to be accompanied with the temper of a man who is not disposed to think too highly of himself: and if, at any time, I have delivered myself with confidence, it will appear, I hope, to be on those subjects, which, from the habits and experience of my life, will justify an unreserved communication of my opinions. I am not a candidate for literary fame; at the same time, I cannot but indulge the hope that this volume, with all its imperfections, will not be thought unworthy the attention of the scientific geographer; and that, by unfolding countries hitherto unexplored, and which, I presume, may now be considered as a part of the British dominions, it will be received as a faithful tribute to the prosperity of my country.

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE.

London,
November 30, 1801.

A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE FUR TRADE FROM CANADA TO THE NORTH-WEST.

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The fur trade, from the earliest settlement of Canada, was considered of the first importance to that colony. The country was then so populous, that, in the vicinity of the establishments, the animals whose skins were precious, in a commercial view, soon became very scarce, if not altogether extinct. They were, it is true, hunted at former periods, but merely for food and clothing. The Indians, therefore, to procure the necessary supply, were encouraged, to penetrate into the country, and were generally accompanied by some of the Canadians, who found means to induce the remotest tribes of natives to bring the skins which were most in demand, to their settlements, in the way of trade.

It is not necessary for me to examine the cause, but experience proves that it requires much less time for a civilized people to deviate into the manners and customs of savage life, than for savages to rise into a state of civilization. Such was the event with those who thus accompanied the natives on their hunting and trading excursions; for they became so attached to the Indian mode of life, that they lost all relish for their former habits and native homes. Hence they derived the title of *Coueurs des Bois*, became a kind of pedlars, and were extremely useful to the merchants engaged in the fur trade; who gave them the necessary credit to proceed on their commercial

undertakings. Three or four of these people would join their stock, put their property into a birch-bark canoe, which they worked themselves, and either accompanied the natives in their excursions, or went at once to the country where they knew they were to hunt. At length, these voyages extended to twelve or fifteen months, when they returned with rich cargoes of furs, and followed by great numbers of the natives. During the short time requisite to settle their accounts with the merchants, and procure fresh credit, they generally contrived to squander away all their gains, when they returned to renew their favourite mode of life: their views being answered, and their labour sufficiently rewarded, by indulging themselves in extravagance and dissipation, during the short space of one month in twelve or fifteen.

This indifference about amassing property, and the pleasure of living free from all restraint, soon brought on a licentiousness of manners which could not long escape the vigilant observation of the missionaries, who had much reason to complain of their being a disgrace to the Christian religion; by not only swerving from its duties themselves, but by thus bringing it into disrepute with those of the natives who had become converts to it; and, consequently, obstructing the great object to which those pious men had devoted their lives. They therefore exerted their influence to procure the suppression of these people, and accordingly, no one was allowed to go up the country to traffic with the Indians, without a license from the government.

At first these permissions were, of course, granted only to those whose character was such as could give no alarm to the zeal of the missionaries: but they were afterwards bestowed as rewards for services, on officers, and their widows; and they, who were not willing or able to make use

of them (which may be supposed to be always the case with those of the latter description), were allowed to sell them to the merchants, who necessarily employed the Coureurs des bois, in quality of their agents; and these people, as may be imagined, gave sufficient cause for the renewal of former complaints; so that the remedy proved, in fact, worse than the disease.

At length, military posts were established at the confluence of the different large lakes of Canada, which, in a great measure checked the evil consequences that followed from the improper conduct of these foresters, and, at the same time, protected the trade. Besides, a number of able and respectable men, retired from the army, prosecuted the trade in person, under their respective licences, with great order and regularity, and extended it to such a distance, as, in those days, was considered to be an astonishing effort of commercial enterprize. These persons and the missionaries having combined their views at the same time, secured the respect of the natives, and the obedience of the people necessarily employed in the laborious parts of this undertaking. These gentlemen denominated themselves commanders, and not traders, though they were entitled to both those characters: and, as for the missionaries, if sufferings and hardships in the prosecution of the great work which they had undertaken, deserved applause and admiration, they had an undoubted claim to be admired and applauded: they spared no labour and avoided no danger in the execution of their important office; and it is to be seriously lamented, that their pious endeavours did not meet with the success which they deserved: for there is hardly a trace to be found beyond the cultivated parts, of their meritorious functions.

The cause of this failure must be attributed to a want of due consideration in the mode employed by the missionaries, to propagate the religion of which they were the zealous ministers. They habituated themselves to the savage life, and naturalized themselves to the savage manners, and, by thus becoming dependent, as it were, on the natives, they acquired their contempt rather than their veneration. If they had been as well acquainted with human nature, as they were with the articles of their faith, they would have known that the uncultivated mind of an Indian must be disposed by much preparatory method and instruction to receive the revealed truths of Christianity, to act under its sanctions, and be impelled to good by the hope of its reward, or turned from evil by the fear of its punishments. They should have begun their work by teaching some of those useful arts which are the inlets of knowledge, and lead the mind by degrees to objects of higher comprehension. Agriculture, so formed to fix and combine society, and so preparatory to objects of superior consideration, should have been the first thing introduced among a savage people: it attaches the wandering tribe to that spot where it adds so much to their comforts; while it gives them a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds. Such were the means by which the forests of Paraguay were converted into a scene of abundant cultivation, and its savage inhabitants introduced to all the advantages of a civilized life.

The Canadian missionaries should have been contented to improve the morals of their own countrymen, so that by meliorating their character and conduct, they would have given a striking example of the effect of religion in promoting the comforts of life to the surrounding savages;

and might by degrees have extended its benign influence to the remotest regions of that country, which was the object, and intended to be the scene, of their evangelical labours. But by bearing the light of the Gospel at once to the distance of two thousand five hundred miles from the civilized part of the colonies, it was soon obscured by the cloud of ignorance that darkened the human mind in those distant regions.

The whole of their long route I have often travelled, and the recollection of such a people as the missionaries having been there, was confined to a few superannuated Canadians, who had not left that country since the cession to the English, in 1763, and who particularly mentioned the death of some, and the distressing situation of them all. But if these religious men did not attain the objects of their persevering piety, they were, during their mission, of great service to the commanders who engaged in those distant expeditions, and spread the fur trade as far West as the banks of the Saskatchiwine river, in 53. North latitude, and longitude 102. West.

At an early period of their intercourse with the savages, a custom was introduced of a very excellent tendency, but is now unfortunately discontinued, of not selling any spirituous liquor to the natives. This admirable regulation was for some time observed, with all the respect due to the religion by which it was sanctioned, and whose severest censures followed the violation of it. A painful penance could alone restore the offender to the suspended rites of the sacrament. The casuistry of trade, however, discovered a way to gratify the Indians with their favourite cordial without incurring the ecclesiastical penalties, by giving, instead of selling it to them.

But notwithstanding all the restrictions with which commerce was oppressed under the French government, the fur trade was extended to the immense distance which has been already stated; and surmounted many most discouraging difficulties, which will be hereafter noticed; while, at the same time, no exertions were made from Hudson's Bay to obtain even a share of the trade of a country, which according to the charter of that company, belonged to it, and, from its proximity, is so much more accessible to the mercantile adventurer.

Of these trading commanders, I understood, that two attempted to penetrate to the Pacific Ocean, but the utmost extent of their journey I could never learn; which may be attributed, indeed, to a failure of the undertaking.

For some time after the conquest of Canada, this trade was suspended, which must have been very advantageous to the Hudson's-Bay Company, as all the inhabitants to the westward of Lake Superior were obliged to go to them for such articles as their habitual use had rendered necessary. Some of the Canadians who had lived long with them, and were become attached to a savage life, accompanied them thither annually, till mercantile adventurers again appeared from their own country, after an interval of several years, owing, as I suppose, to an ignorance of the country in the conquerors, and their want of commercial confidence in the conquered. There were, indeed, other discouragements, such as the immense length of the journey necessary to reach the limits beyond which this commerce must begin; the risk of property; the expenses attending such a long transport; and an ignorance of the language of those who, from their experience, must be necessarily employed as the intermediate agents between them and the natives. But, notwithstanding these difficulties, the trade, by degrees,

began to spread over the different parts to which it had been carried by the French, though at a great risk of the lives, as well as the property of their new possessors, for the natives had been taught by their former allies to entertain hostile dispositions towards the English, from their having been in alliance with their natural enemies the Iroquois; and there were not wanting a sufficient number of discontented, disappointed people, to keep alive such a notion; so that for a long time they were considered and treated as objects of hostility. To prove this disposition of the Indians, we have only to refer to the conduct of Pontiac, at Detroit, and the surprise and taking of Michilimakinac, about this period.

Hence it arose, that it was so late as the year 1766, before which, the trade I mean to consider, commenced from Michilimakinac. The first who attempted it were satisfied to go the length of the river Camenistiquia, about thirty miles to the Eastward of the Grande Portage, where the French had a principal establishment, and was the line of their communication with the interior country. It was once destroyed by fire. Here they went and returned successful in the following spring to Michilimakinac. Their success induced them to renew their journey, and incited others to follow their example. Some of them remained at Camenistiquia, while others proceeded to and beyond the Grande Portage, which, since that time has become the principal entrepot of that trade, and is situated in a bay, in latitude 48. North, and longitude 90. West. After passing the usual season there, they went back to Michilimakinac as before, and encouraged by the trade, returned in increased numbers. One of these, Thomas Curry, with a spirit of enterprize superior to that of his contemporaries, determined to penetrate to the furthest limits of the French discoveries in that country; or at least till the frost should

stop him. For this purpose he procured guides and interpreters, who were acquainted with the country, and with four canoes arrived at Fort Bourbon, which was one of their posts, at the West end of the Cedar Lake, on the waters of the Saskatchiwine. His risk and toil were well recompensed, for he came back the following spring with his canoes filled with fine furs, with which he proceeded to Canada, and was satisfied never again to return to the Indian country.

From this period, people began to spread over every part of the country, particularly where the French had established settlements.

Mr. James Finlay was the first who followed Mr. Curry's example, and with the same number of canoes, arrived, in the course of the next season, at Nipawee, the last of the French settlements on the bank of the Saskatchiwine river, in latitude nearly $43\frac{1}{2}$. North, and longitude 103. West: he found the good fortune, as he followed, in every respect, the example, of his predecessor.

As may be supposed, there were now people enough ready to replace them, and the trade was pursued with such avidity, and irregularity, that in a few years it became the reverse of what it ought to have been. An animated competition prevailed, and the contending parties carried the trade beyond the French limits, though with no benefit to themselves or neighbours, the Hudson's-Bay Company; who in the year 1774, and not till then, thought proper to move from home to the East bank of Sturgeon Lake, in latitude 53. 56. North, and longitude 102. 15. West, and became more jealous of their fellow subjects; and, perhaps, with more cause, than they had been of those of France. From this period, to the present time, they have been following the Canadians to their different establishments,

while, on the contrary, there is not a solitary instance that the Canadians have followed them; and there are many trading posts which they have not yet attained. This, however, will no longer be a mystery, when the nature and policy of the Hudson's-Bay Company is compared with that, which has been pursued by their rivals in this trade.—But to return to my subject.

This competition, which has been already mentioned, gave a fatal blow to the trade from Canada, and, with other incidental causes, in my opinion, contributed to its ruin. This trade was carried on in a very distant country, out of the reach of legal restraint, and where there was a free scope given to any ways or means in attaining advantage. The consequence was not only the loss of commercial benefit to the persons engaged in it, but of the good opinion of the natives, and the respect of their men, who were inclined to follow their example; so that with drinking, carousing, and quarrelling with the Indians along their route, and among themselves, they seldom reached their winter quarters; and if they did, it was generally by dragging their property upon sledges, as the navigation was closed up by the frost. When at length they were arrived, the object of each was to injure his rival traders in the opinion of the natives as much as was in their power, by misrepresentation and presents, for which the agents employed were peculiarly calculated. They considered the command of their employer as binding on them, and however wrong or irregular the transaction, the responsibility rested with the principal who directed them. This is Indian law. Thus did they waste their credit and their property with the natives, till the first was past redemption, and the last was nearly exhausted; so that towards the spring in each year, the rival parties found it absolutely necessary to join, and make one common stock of what

remained, for the purpose of trading with the natives, who could entertain no respect for persons who had conducted themselves with so much irregularity and deceit. The winter, therefore, was one continued scene of disagreements and quarrels, If any one had the precaution or good sense to keep clear of these proceedings, he derived a proportionable advantage from his good conduct, and frequently proved a peacemaker between the parties. To such an height had they carried this licentious conduct, that they were in a continual state of alarm, and were even frequently stopped to pay tribute on their route into the country; though they had adopted the plan of travelling together in parties of thirty or forty canoes, and keeping their men armed; which sometimes, indeed, proved necessary for their defence.

Thus was the trade carried on for several years, and consequently becoming worse and worse, so that the partners, who met them at the Grande Portage, naturally complained of their ill success. But specious reasons were always ready to prove that it arose from circumstances which they could not at that time control; and encouragements were held forth to hope that a change would soon take place, which would make ample amends for past disappointments.

It was about this time, that Mr. Joseph Frobisher, one of the gentlemen engaged in the trade, determined to penetrate into the country yet unexplored, to the North and Westward, and, in the spring of the year 1775, met the Indians from that quarter on their way to Fort Churchill, at Portage de Traite, so named from that circumstance, on the banks of the Missinipi, or Churchill river, latitude 55. 25. North, longitude 103½. West. It was indeed, with some difficulty that he could induce them to trade with him, but

he at length procured as many furs as his canoes could carry. In this perilous expedition he sustained every kind of hardship incident to a journey through a wild and savage country, where his subsistence depended on what the woods and the waters produced. These difficulties, nevertheless, did not discourage him from returning in the following year, when he was equally successful. He then sent his brother to explore the country still further West, who penetrated as far as the lake of Isle a la Crosse, in latitude 55. 26. North, and longitude 108. West.

He, however, never after wintered among the Indians, though he retained a large interest in the trade, and a principal share in the direction of it till the year 1798, when he retired to enjoy the fruits of his labours; and, by his hospitality, became known to every respectable stranger who visited Canada.

The success of this gentleman induced others to follow his example, and in the spring of the year 1778, some of the traders on the Saskatchewan river, finding they had a quantity of goods to spare, agreed to put them into a joint stock, and gave the charge and management of them to Mr. Peter Pond, who, in four canoes, was directed to enter the English River, so called by Mr. Frobisher, to follow his track, and proceed still further; if possible, to Athabasca, a country hitherto unknown but from Indian report. In this enterprise he at length succeeded and pitched his tent on the banks of the Elk river, by him erroneously called the Athabasca river, about forty miles from the Lake of the Hills, into which it empties itself.

Here he passed the winter of 1778-9; saw a vast concourse of the Knisteneaux and Chepewyan tribes, who used to carry their furs annually to Churchill; the latter by the barren grounds, where they suffered innumerable

hardships, and were sometimes even starved to death. The former followed the course of the lakes and rivers, through a country that abounded in animals, and where there was plenty of fish: but though they did not suffer from want of food, the intolerable fatigue of such a journey could not be easily repaid to an Indian: they were, therefore, highly gratified by seeing people come to their country to relieve them from such long, toilsome, and dangerous journeys; and were immediately reconciled to give an advanced price for the articles necessary to their comfort and convenience. Mr. Pond's reception and success was accordingly beyond his expectation; and he procured twice as many furs as his canoes would carry. They also supplied him with as much provision as he required during his residence among them, and sufficient for his homeward voyage. Such of the furs as he could not embark, he secured in one of his winter huts, and they were found the following season, in the same state in which he left them.

These, however, were but partial advantages, and could not prevent the people of Canada from seeing the improper conduct of some of their associates, which rendered it dangerous to remain any longer among the natives. Most of them who passed the winter at the Saskatchiwine, got to the Eagle hills, where, in the spring of the year 1780, a few days previous to their intended departure, a large band of Indians being engaged in drinking about their houses, one of the traders, to ease himself of the troublesome importunities of a native, gave him a dose of laudanum in a glass of grog, which effectually prevented him from giving further trouble to any one, by setting him asleep for ever. This accident produced a fray, in which one of the traders, and several of the men were killed, while the rest had no other means to save themselves but by a precipitate flight,

abandoning a considerable quantity of goods, and near half the furs which they had collected during the winter and the spring.

About the same time, two of the establishments on the Assiniboin river, were attacked with less justice, when several white men, and a great number of Indians were killed. In short, it appeared, that the natives had formed a resolution to extirpate the traders; and, without entering into any further reasonings on the subject, it appears to be incontrovertible, that the irregularity pursued in carrying on the trade has brought it into its present forlorn situation; and nothing but the greatest calamity that could have befallen the natives, saved the traders from destruction: this was the small-pox, which spread its destructive and desolating power, as the fire consumes the dry grass of the field. The fatal infection spread around with a baneful rapidity which no flight could escape, and with a fatal effect that nothing could resist. It destroyed with its pestilential breath whole families and tribes; and the horrid scene presented to those who had the melancholy and afflicting opportunity of beholding it, a combination of the dead, the dying, and such as to avoid the horrid fate of their friends around them, prepared to disappoint the plague of its prey, by terminating their own existence.

The habits and lives of these devoted people, which provided not to-day for the wants of to-morrow, must have heightened the pains of such an affliction, by leaving them not only without remedy, but even without alleviation. Naught was left them but to submit in agony and despair.

To aggravate the picture, if aggravation were possible, may be added, the putrid carcasses which the wolves, with a furious voracity, dragged forth from the huts, or which were mangled within them by the dogs, whose hunger was

satisfied with the disfigured remains of their masters. Nor was it uncommon for the father of a family, whom the infection had not reached, to call them around him to represent the cruel sufferings and horrid fate of their relations, from the influence of some evil spirit who was preparing to extirpate their race; and to incite them to baffle death, with all its horrors, by their own poniards. At the same time, if their hearts failed them in this necessary act, he was himself ready to perform the deed of mercy with his own hand, as the last act of his affection, and instantly to follow them to the common place of rest and refuge from human evil.

It was never satisfactorily ascertained by what means this malignant disorder was introduced, but it was generally supposed to be from the Missouri, by a war party.

The consequence of this melancholy event to the traders must be self-evident; the means of disposing of their goods were cut off; and no furs were obtained, but such as had been gathered from the habitations of the deceased Indians, which could not be very considerable: nor did they look from the losses of the present year, with any encouraging expectations to those which were to come. The only fortunate people consisted of a party who had again penetrated to the Northward and Westward in 1780, at some distance up the Missinipi, or English river, to Lake la Ronge. Two unfortunate circumstances, however, happened to them; which are as follow:

Mr. Wadin, a Swiss gentleman, of strict probity and known sobriety, had gone there in the year 1779, and remained during the summer of 1780. His partners and others, engaged in an opposite interest, when at the Grande Portage, agreed to send a quantity of goods on their joint account, which was accepted, and Mr. Pond was proposed

by them to be their representative to act in conjunction with Mr. Wadin. Two men, of more opposite characters, could not, perhaps, have been found. In short, from various causes, their situations became very uncomfortable to each other, and mutual ill-will was the natural consequence: without entering, therefore, into a minute history of these transactions, it will be sufficient to observe, that, about the end of the year 1780, or the beginning of 1781, Mr. Wadin had received Mr. Pond and one of his own clerks to dinner; and, in the course of the night, the former was shot through the lower part of the thigh, when it was said that he expired from the loss of blood, and was buried next morning at eight o'clock. Mr. Pond, and the clerk, were tried for this murder at Montreal, and acquitted: nevertheless, their innocence was not so apparent as to extinguish the original suspicion.

The other circumstance was this. In the spring of the year, Mr. Pond sent the abovementioned clerk to meet the Indians from the Northward, who used to go annually to Hudson's Bay; when he easily persuaded them to trade with him, and return back, that they might not take the contagion which had depopulated the country to the Eastward of them: but most unfortunately they caught it here, and carried it with them, to the destruction of themselves and the neighbouring tribes.

The country being thus depopulated, the traders and their friends from Canada, who, from various causes already mentioned, were very much reduced in number, became confined to two parties, who began seriously to think of making permanent establishments on the Missinipi river, and at Athabasca; for which purpose, in 1781-2, they selected their best canoe-men, being ignorant that the small-pox penetrated that way. The most expeditious party got only in time to the Portage la Loche, or Mithy-Quinigam,

which divides the waters of the Missinipi from those that fall into the Elk river, to despatch one canoe strong-handed, and light-loaded, to that country; but, on their arrival there, they found, in every direction, the ravages of the small-pox; so that, from the great diminution of the natives, they returned in the spring with no more than seven packages of beaver. The strong woods and mountainous countries afforded a refuge to those who fled from the contagion of the plains; but they were so alarmed at the surrounding destruction, that they avoided the traders, and were dispirited from hunting, except for their subsistence. The traders, however, who returned into the country in the year 1782-3, found the inhabitants in some sort of tranquillity, and more numerous than they had reason to expect, so that their success was proportionably better.

During the winter of 1783-4, the merchants of Canada, engaged in this trade, formed a junction of interests, under the name of the North-West Company, and divided it into sixteen shares, without depositing any capital; each party furnishing a proportion or quota of such articles as were necessary to carry on the trade: the respective parties agreeing to satisfy the friends they had in the country, who were not provided for, according to this agreement, out of the proportions which they held. The management of the whole was accordingly entrusted to Messrs. Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher, and Mr. Simon M'Tavish, two distinct houses, who had the greatest interest and influence in the country, and for which they were to receive a stipulated commission in all transactions.

In the spring, two of those gentlemen went to the Grande Portage with their credentials, which were confirmed and ratified by all the parties having an option, except Mr. Peter Pond, who was not satisfied with the share allotted him.

Accordingly he, and another gentleman, Mr. Peter Pangman, who had a right to be a partner, but for whom no provision had been made, came to Canada, with a determination to return to the country, if they could find any persons to join them, and give their scheme a proper support.

The traders in the country, and merchants at Montreal, thus entered into a co-partnership, which, by these means, was consolidated and directed by able men, who, from the powers with which they were entrusted, would carry on the trade to the utmost extent it would bear. The traders in the country, therefore, having every reason to expect that their past and future labours would be recompensed, forgot all their former animosities, and engaged with the utmost spirit and activity, to forward the general interest; so that, in the following year, they met their agents at the Grande Portage, with their canoes laden with rich furs from the different parts of that immense tract of country. But this satisfaction was not to be enjoyed without some interruption; and they were mortified to find that Mr. Pangman had prevailed on Messrs. Gregory and Macleod to join him, and give him their support in the business, though deserted by Mr. Pond, who accepted the terms offered by his former associates.

In the counting-house of Mr. Gregory I had been five years; and at this period had left him, with a small adventure of goods, with which he had entrusted me, to seek my fortune at Detroit. He, without any solicitation on my part, had procured an insertion in the agreement, that I should be admitted a partner in this business, on condition that I would proceed to the Indian country in the following spring, 1785. His partner came to Detroit to make me such a proposition. I readily assented to it, and immediately proceeded to the Grande Portage, where I joined my associates.

We now found that independent of the natural difficulties of the undertaking, we should have to encounter every other which they, who were already in possession of the trade of the country, could throw in our way, and which their circumstances enabled them to do. Nor did they doubt, from their own superior experience, as well as that of their clerks and men, with their local knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, that they should soon compel us to leave the country to them. The event, however, did not justify their expectations; for, after the severest struggle ever known in that part of the world, and suffering every oppression which a jealous and rival spirit could instigate; after the murder of one of our partners, the laming of another, and the narrow escape of one of our clerks, who received a bullet through his powder horn, in the execution of his duty, they were compelled to allow us a share of the trade. As we had already incurred a loss, this union was, in every respect, a desirable event to us, and was concluded in the month of July, 1787.

This commercial establishment was now founded on a more solid basis than any hitherto known in the country; and it not only continued in full force, vigour, and prosperity, in spite of all interference from Canada, but maintained at least an equal share of advantage with the Hudson's-Bay Company, notwithstanding the superiority of their local situation. The following account of this self-erected concern will manifest the cause of its success.

It assumed the title of the North-West Company, and was no more than an association of commercial men, agreeing among themselves to carry on the fur trade, unconnected with any other business, though many of the parties engaged had extensive concerns altogether foreign to it. It may be said to have been supported entirely upon credit;

for, whether the capital belonged to the proprietor, or was borrowed, it equally bore interest, for which the association was annually accountable. It consisted of twenty shares, unequally divided among the persons concerned. Of these, a certain proportion was held by the people who managed the business in Canada, and were styled agents for the Company. Their duty was to import the necessary goods from England, store them at their own expense at Montreal, get them made up into articles suited to the trade, pack and forward them, and supply the cash that might be wanting for the outfits, for which they received, independent of the profit on their shares, a commission on the amount of the accounts, which they were obliged to make out annually, and keep the adventure of each year distinct. Two of them went annually to the Grande Portage, to manage and transact the business there, and on the communication at Detroit, Michilimakinac, St. Mary's, and at Montreal, where they received, stored, packed up, and shipped the company's furs for England, on which they had also a small commission. The remaining shares were held by the proprietors, who were obliged to winter and manage the business of the concern with the Indians, and their respective clerks, etc. They were not supposed to be under any obligation to furnish capital, or even credit. If they obtained any capital by the trade, it was to remain in the hands of the agents; for which they were allowed interest. Some of them, from their long services and influence, held double shares, and were allowed to retire from the business at any period of the existing concern, with one of those shares, naming any young man in the company's service to succeed him in the other. Seniority and merit were, however, considered as affording a claim to the succession, which, nevertheless, could not be disposed of without the

concurrence of the majority of the concern; who, at the same time, relieved the seceding person from any responsibility respecting the share that he transferred, and accounted for it according to the annual value or rate of the property; so that the seller could have no advantage, but that of getting the share of stock which he retained realised, and receiving for the transferred share what was fairly determined to be the worth of it. The former was also discharged from all duty, and became a dormant partner. Thus, all the young men who were not provided for at the beginning of the contract, succeeded in succession to the character and advantages of partners. They entered into the Company's service for five or seven years, under such expectations, and their reasonable prospects were seldom disappointed: there were, indeed, instances when they succeeded to shares, before their apprenticeship was expired, and it frequently happened, that they were provided for while they were in a state of articed clerkship. Shares were transferable only to the concern at large, as no person could be admitted as a partner who had not served his time to the trade. The dormant partner indeed might dispose of his interest to any one he chose, but if the transaction was not acknowledged by his associates, the purchaser could only be considered as his agent or attorney. Every share had a vote, and two-thirds formed a majority. This regular and equitable mode of providing for the clerks of the company, excited a spirit of emulation in the discharge of their various duties, and in fact, made every agent a principal, who perceived his own prosperity to be immediately connected with that of his employers. Indeed, without such a spirit, such a trade could not have become so extended and advantageous, as it has been and now is.