
CHAPTER IV

THE "LITTLE COMPANY" OF SCOTTISH TRADERS

ONE of the dominant features of the Scottish race is its independence. The right of private judgment has been greatly emphasised in the religion of Scotland. A strong individualism is the reaction from spiritual and intellectual tyranny, and this has been remarkably shown in Scotland. The late Dr. Sprott, of North Berwick, used to tell of seven religious people, in Galloway, who held a select service of their own in a farmhouse. A spectator noticed that, after a few weeks, three of the seven met in one room and four in another. One of the seven being asked the cause of this division answered: "Ah, weel, we couldna' just see eye to eye, and we thocht it better to pairt!" The world is now seeing more clearly the importance of collectivism as a reaction from such individualism. This individualism is thus seen to have been very characteristic of Scotchmen. The fur trade showed this tendency even under the new conditions of Scotsmen in America. The fur trade union was really a rope of sand, and the Company at Montreal was

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little more than a clearing-house for the partners concerned. Each had his share in the trade, and the Montreal accountants had but to make up the profits or losses of the yearly trade and divide them pro rata among the partners, most of whom were far away in the Fur Country. In 1787 there was an attempt made to centralise the business to a greater extent, but it will be remembered that dissension immediately followed. At the meeting in Grand Portage held by the traders in 1795 matters, as we have seen, assumed a critical aspect, and there was a secession, favoured by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, but from which he withheld himself for three years. Forsyth, Richardson and Co. were, however, the rallying centre of the "New North-West Company," as they wished to call themselves. They for trade purposes in 1795 were called the "X Y Company." This name arose from the practice of the old Company marking its bales "N.W.," and the new Company took X Y, which were the next letters of the alphabet. They were not, however, contractions, and should not be written so. The strong spirit of "Le Premier" McTavish, however, still dominated in the old Company, and they despisingly called their opponents "The Little Company" or "The Little Society." In the wild region of Athabasca the old Company referred to the X Y Company as the "Potties," probably a corruption of "Les Petits—"The Little Ones," meaning members of of "La Petite Compagnie." This nicknaming was practised on the old Company traders themselves

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by the Hudson's Bay Company, who called their opponents "The Pedlars."

A great spirit took hold of the "Little Company," and this again stirred up the older Company. The X Y Company vigorously duplicated every fort, erecting a new building within a stone's throw of the old. In 1797 the X Ys erected a rival house at Grand Portage—the very centre of the old business. A few years later when the Nor'-Westers built Fort William on the Kaministiquia their opponents erected another within a mile's distance. At the mouth of the Souris River, where Brandon House had been built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1794, there was, of course, the Nor'-Wester Fort, the X Y Fort, and two free traders' forts—five in all, McCracken and Jussaume, the independent traders, classing with the others.

"For three years," we are told by Ex-Governor Masson, "there was at this time an uninterrupted succession of troubles, differences, and misunderstandings between the opposing leaders—McTavish, Mackenzie, and their followers." Those who admire "good haters in a cause" might at this time be easily satisfied.

In 1799 Alexander Mackenzie declared his intention of leaving the old Company, and next year a letter was read at Grand Portage from "Le Marquis," saying: "I feel hurt at the distrust and want of confidence that appeared throughout all your deliberations last summer."

Soon after the meeting of 1800 Mackenzie

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journeyed to his native land, received his knight-hood from the King, and hurried back to Canada to throw himself most fiercely into the fray.

The opposition now became on both sides most unscrupulous. Both parties acted as brigands rather than as gentlemen of station.

What these Scotsmen were capable of in this respect was but a repetition of the good old times among the nobility of Scotland in the days of Bruce, when there were thirteen claimants for the Scottish throne, or of the "parlous" days of the five Jameses, few of whom died peacefully upon their beds.

Records of these days in the North-West such as those of Alexander Henry, jun., show that strong drink became a constant medium of working upon the Indians—a thing almost unknown before this time in Rupert's Land. Violence, far greater than ever before, became common. The war was carried into far-away Athabasca. We have mentioned in a previous chapter the defensive steps taken with such determination by Simon McTavish and his Company as he threw down the gauntlet to all—X Y Company, Hudson's Bay Company, and free traders alike—when the war raged from Hudson Bay to the Rocky Mountains.

These were the days of the Scottish giants of the fur trade! Suddenly the death of Simon McTavish took place in 1804, and an agreement was almost immediately reached between the rival Companies.

On the completion of the Union and the forma-

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tion of the reunited Company several important conditions were agreed on: 1. No business other than that of the fur trade, or what was necessarily dependent on it, could be carried on by the United Company.

2. No partners were to be allowed to have any private business carried on near the forts.

3. By common consent the selling of spirits to the Indian was to be discontinued and discouraged.

4. The expense incurred by Simon McTavish in his ventures on Hudson Bay would not be borne by the United North-West Company.

It is interesting to peruse the names of the partners of the two Companies which united, and to observe how remarkably Scottish the two Companies were in their personnel.

OLD NORTH-WEST COMPANY.

John Finlay	D. Thompson	John McDonald
Duncan Cameron	John Thompson	Alexander N. McLeod
James Hughes	John Gregory	Donald McTavish
Alexander McKay	Wm. McGillivray	John McDonnell
Hugh McGillis	Duncan McGillivray	Charles Chaboillez
Alexander Henry, jr.	Wm. Hallowell	John Sayer
John McGillivray	Roderick McKenzie	Peter Grant
James McKenzie	Angus Shaw	Alexander Fraser
Simon Fraser	D. C. McKenzie	Aeneas Cameron
John D. Campbell	Wm. McKay	Alexander McDougall

THE NEW NORTH-WEST COMPANY OR X Y COMPANY.

Sir Alex. Mackenzie	John Haldane	Alex. MacKenzie (2)
Thomas Forsyth	John Forsyth	John Macdonald
John Richardson	Leith, Jameson &	James Leith
John Inglis	Co., by Trustees	John Wills
James Forsyth	John Ogilvie	
Alexander Ellice	P. de Rocheblave	

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Of these forty-six prominent men of the fur trade in the two companies there seem to be only six who are known to be not Scotsmen. These are Hughes, Chaboillez, Gregory, Sayer, Rocheblave, and John Wills.

Those who know the history of Canada of this period will recognise the influential places held by the forty Scotsmen who now combined in a peaceful union. Among them were Legislative Councillors, members of the Legislative Assembly, leaders in society, the chief men in trade and finance in Montreal.

These men in the twenty years which were to follow the happy union were to be celebrated as traders, explorers, fort-builders, benefactors, civic representatives, writers, leaders in all departments of Canadian life.

Truly Scottish energy, business activity—and shall we not say honesty and good citizenship—are here vindicated beyond dispute.