

A TIMELY REVIEW OF CANADA'S OLDEST COMPANY.

"The Company of Adventurers of England, trading into Hudson's Bay," commonly known as the Hudson's Bay Company, now celebrating its 250th. anniversary.
By F. S. Garner.

The company's beginnings have a peculiar interest at the present time: not merely because its history is just rounding its 250th anniversary, but because its formation was the immediate outgrowth of one of those periods of expansion which, so frequently in history, has followed a period of struggle.

It was in the year 1670 that Charles Second granted a charter to his cousin, "Prince Rupert" and a number of other noblemen and gentlemen to trade into Hudson's Bay. England had just passed through a revolution, followed by a long period of repression, and then by a period of license. The great host of adventurers, to whom a long period of war had given employment, had almost exhausted the possibilities at home of the great Restoration, and the air was filled with the discussion of grand schemes for adventure over seas, with possible acquisition of large rewards in a short space of time. Every London tavern and coffee house resounded with wonderful schemes for conquest, trade, or the exploitation of distant lands, and the Court was literally besieged with petitions for grants and patents, from all manner of people.

It was not, therefore, surprising that in due time, certain of these adventurers should have turned their thoughts to a country which was steadily coming into prominence as a land of possibility, the country around Hudson's Bay.

HOW THE COMPANY ORIGINATED.

Stories of how the French were reaping a golden harvest there, were circulated by two French Canadians named Gros-eilliers and Radisson, who had recently been trading out of Quebec, and being dissatisfied with conditions as they then existed, determined to interest the people of France in the formation of a company to develop the portion of Canada then unknown.



Signing of Charter by King Charles II on May 2nd, 1670.

Finding that the people of France were unwilling to spend money on this enterprise, the two men sailed for England, and eventually succeeded in interesting "Prince Rupert" with the result that in the spring of 1668 a company was formed, and a small expedition set sail in the ship "Nonsuch" for Hudson's Bay. Arriving in the Fall, they sailed down into James Bay, where a site was selected for winter quarters at Rupert's River, and the first fort was built and called Fort Charles.

TERMS OF CHARTER

Next year, the "Nonsuch" returned to England, her venture being so successful that a charter was sought and obtained from Charles Second which gave to the company, under the

name of the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay, the power of holding and alienating lands, and the sole right of trade in Hudson Strait, and with the territories upon the coast of same. The territory which was described as Rupert's Land, consisted of the whole region whose waters flowed into Hudson's Bay, and was of quite unknown extent. Throughout this vast country, the Company was empowered to erect forts, make reprisals, send home all English subjects entering the Bay without a license, and to declare war and make peace with any prince or people not Christian.

Prince Rupert was made Governor of the Company, but the position was indeed a difficult one, for so anxious were the French to get this country that between 1670 and 1680, the Company's forts and ships had been taken by the French three times, and later when peace terms were arranged, it necessitated all the influence the Company could secure to prevent their possessions from being ceded to France.

THE FIRST PUBLIC SALE OF FURS

On November 17th 1671, the Company announced its first public sale of furs to take place on December 5th, 1671, it comprising three thousand weight of beaver skins, the only fur having any intrinsic value at that time. The sale created much interest, and many distinguished persons attended, including Prince Rupert, Duke of York and others.

Prince Rupert died in 1682, after twelve years of faithful service, and was succeeded by H.R.H. James, Duke of York, afterwards King James Second.

THE FIRST DIVIDEND

On his accession to the position of Governor fresh impetus was given to the company, many new forts were established, and greater prosperity prevailed, resulting in the paying of the first dividend to its shareholders in 1684. In the following February by the demise of H. R. H. King Charles Second, the Duke of York (then Governor of the Company) ascended



Pathfinder Being Chased by a Grizzly Bear.