

I am going, later, to ask the reader to visit Rupert's Land when the company had shaken off its timidity, overcome its obstacles, and dotted all British America with its posts and forts. Then we shall see the interiors of the forts, view the strange yet not always hard or uncouth life of the company's factors and clerks, and glance along the trails and water-courses, mainly unchanged to-day, to note the work and surroundings of the Indians, the *voyageurs*, and the rest who inhabit that region. But, fortunately, I can first show, at least roughly, much that is interesting about the company's growth and methods a century and a half ago. The information is gotten from some English Parliamentary papers forming a report of a committee of the House of Commons in 1749.

Arthur Dobbs and others petitioned Parliament to give them either the rights of the Hudson Bay Company or a similar charter. It seems that England had offered £20,000 reward to whosoever should find the bothersome passage to the Southern seas *viâ* the North Pole, and that these petitioners had sent out two ships for that purpose. They said that when others had done no more than this in Charles II.'s time, that monarch had given them "the greatest privileges as lords proprietors" of the Hudson Bay territory, and that those recipients of royal favor were bounden to attempt the discovery of the desired passage. Instead of this, they not only failed to search effectually or in earnest for the passage, but they had rather endeavored to conceal the same, and to obstruct the discovery thereof by others. They had not possessed or occupied any of the lands granted to them, or extended their trade, or made any plantations or settlements, or permitted other British subjects to plant, settle, or trade there. They had established only four factories and one small trading-house; yet they had connived at or allowed the French to encroach, settle, and trade within their limits, to the great detriment and loss of Great Britain. The petitioners argued that the Hudson Bay charter was monopolistic, and therefore void, and at any rate it had been forfeited "by non-user or abuser."

In the course of the hearing upon both sides, the "voyages upon discovery," according to the company's own showing,

were not undertaken until the corporation had been in existence nearly fifty years, and then the search had only been prosecuted during eighteen years, and with only ten expeditions. Two ships sent out from England never reached the bay, but those which succeeded, and were then ready for adventurous cruising, made exploratory voyages that lasted only between one month and ten weeks, so that, as we are accustomed to judge such expeditions, they seem farcical and mere pretences. Yet their largest ship was only of 190 tons burden, and the others were a third smaller—vessels like our small coasting schooners. The most particular instructions to the captains were to trade with all natives, and persuade them to kill whales, sea-horses, and seals; and, subordinately and incidentally, "by God's permission," to find out the Strait of Annian, a fanciful sheet of water, with tales of which that irresponsible Greek sea-tramp, Juan de Fuca, had disturbed all Christendom, saying that it led between a great island in the Pacific (Vancouver) and the mainland into the inland lakes. To the factors at their forts the company sent such lukewarm messages as, "and if you can by any means find out any discovery or matter to the northward or elsewhere in the company's interest or advantage, do not fail to let us know every year."

The attitude of the company toward discovery suggests a Dogberry at its head, bidding his servants to "comprehend" the Northwest passage, but should they fail, to thank God they were rid of a villain. In truth, they were traders pure and simple, and were making great profits with little trouble and expense.

They brought from England about £4000 worth of powder, shot, guns, fire-steels, flints, gun-worms, powder-horns, pistols, hatchets, sword blades, awl blades, ice chisels, files, kettles, fish-hooks, net lines, burning-glasses, looking-glasses, tobacco, brandy, goggles, gloves, hats, lace, needles, thread, thimbles, breeches, vermilion, worsted sashes, blankets, flannels, red feathers, buttons, beads, and "shirts, shoes, and stockings." They spent, in keeping up their posts and ships, about £15,000, and in return they brought to England castor, whale fins, whale oil, deer horns, goose quills, bed feathers, and skins—in all of a value of about £26,000 per annum. I have taken the average