

Welch set a high value on them as early as the time of Howel Dda, in 940, and, from its being first an article of dress, used only by the poorer class of the community, it, by gradually extending itself, came to be one of luxury, of the highest value, in which kings and princes vied with each other in their costly magnificence and display; their clothes were not only fashioned of them, but even their tents were lined with the finest varieties. Such was the display of the great Cham of Tartary, when he was visited in his tent by Marco Polo, about the year 1252. It had become so much in use, and so high in price, that Edward III, in the year 1337, deemed it expedient to prohibit its use to any but those who could afford to spend an hundred pounds a year, without detriment to their property. At that day, having exhausted those parts of Europe which had supplied them, the price increasing with a growing demand, they were obliged to seek them elsewhere, and procured their supplies from the north of Asia. This, for a long time, poured into the adjoining parts of Europe immense sums, as it was in that direction they were brought to market. This trade, so valuable to that part of the world, had no competition, nor were other sources of supply even known until Francis I. of France, in the year 1514, sent Jacques Curtis, of St. Maloes, to make discoveries in this country. That gentleman entered the St. Lawrence, and exchanged his merchandise for fur, which was the commencement of a feeble trade, that was continued until the year 1608, when Samuel Champlain went some distance up that river, and laid the foundation of the town of Quebec, as a trading establishment, and commenced a system which, however, did not greatly flourish until about the year 1640. But very soon after that company came into the possession of England, this trade was cherished and greatly increased, and the dominion of the Hudson's Bay enabled her, not only to supply Russia itself, and all Europe, but even to send it to Turkey, and round the Cape of Good Hope, to distant China. That trade which had destroyed all competition, and, in the hands of well regulated companies, capable of enriching an empire, had yielded a part of its profits to the skill and industry of individuals upon our western shore; that skill and that industry has withered, not for the want of fostering care, but justice and protection.

The fur trade of Canada has long been conducted by well organized companies; and, although they encounter infinite difficulties, yet the great profit of their business enables them to overcome them, and to divide a considerable per cent. All those articles intended as supplies for the Indians are shipped at Montreal, and carried far into the interior, through lakes and rivers and difficult streams, until they arrive even in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains. The increasing wealth derived from this source induced a large increase of capital, and corresponding exertions to obtain a more extensive knowledge of the rivers and lakes through which their merchandise was to be carried, and a more extensive acquaintance with the natives, among whom they were eventually to be disposed of for furs, the produce of the