

prietors of Rupert's Land was given—even more vaguely—‘the whole and entire trade and traffic to and from all havens, bays, creeks, rivers, lakes, and seas into which they shall find entrance or passage by water or land out of the territories, limits, and places aforesaid.’ Though the Company permitted more than a century to elapse without making any considerable incursions into these vast territories, yet, as we shall presently find, it needed no very forced interpretation to extend the powers given to them to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

From whatever cause, it was not until the close of the last century that the Hudson's Bay Company entered upon any practical assertion of their claim to the vast inland districts; when, indeed, a rival company of great energy had already invaded them. The North-West Company numbered amongst its shareholders some of the most influential and enterprising merchants of the Canadas. It possessed no charter, enjoyed no royal privileges; but it found huge territories unoccupied, and it occupied them with wonderful rapidity, and with that somewhat more than ordinary *esprit de corps* which soon came to distinguish these two great trading associations. At the opening of the present century, this new rival Company had established ‘Forts’ (or trading depôts with the Indian hunters) throughout all the more remote districts. It had crossed the Rocky Mountains, and continued its forts down the Columbia, the Fraser, the Caledonia,—and, more generally, throughout the whole district then called New Caledonia, but now known as the Colony of British Columbia.

The Hudson's Bay Company understood their Charter as applying to ‘all lands watered by streams flowing into Hudson's Bay,’ and it required no very great ingenuity to trace these streams far within the fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains. Indeed, the whole of this huge country, from thence to the shores of the Atlantic, may be taken as one vast plain, uninterrupted by any considerable watershed. The great torrents which pour down the eastern flanks of the Rocky Mountains exhaust their early impetuosity ere they reach within 2,000 miles of the coast. Local depressions have led to that network of lakes, or, more properly, inland seas, which, in their vast size and frequency, render peculiar this portion of the surface of the globe. Evaporation, however, throughout these regions is but slight; and, immense as are these lakes, they are wholly unable to retain the great volumes of water which enter them. Hence they are found to be invariably furnished with outlets as large as the streams which supply them. These outlets either, in their turn, enter other lakes, or find their way as independent rivers to the