

## Rupert's Land.

What is now considered the Canadian Northwest was, in the early days of exploration, called by the above name, from the date of the Hudson's Bay Company's charter, on the 2nd of May, 1670. The name was given in honor of Prince Rupert, the Royal head of the newly formed company, and to the present day the name is applied to the territory west of Lake Superior and east of the Rocky Mountains, notwithstanding the fact that provinces and territories have been carved out of the great area, since the formation of the Canadian Confederacy in 1870.

It is not in the line of a trade journal to follow the historical movement since the first attempts at settlement of this great land. Writers more able have attended to that work, and the chapters and periods are all more or less familiar to most readers of *The Commercial*.

What this journal has most to do with is the progress of trade growth in the country, and that progress may be said to have commenced in reality with the entering of Rupert's Land into the Canadian Confederation.

It is true that for nearly two hundred years previous to Confederation the Hudson's Bay Company carried on a crude system of trade or barter with the Aborigines all over the country. But the system was so crude and so monopolistic in its form, that it could scarcely be considered a system of progressive, or even civilized, trade. That the system had its good points is without doubt. The company, while it sometimes sent out men of severe and tyrannical notions as officers, invariably sent out men who had ideas of justice, or at least of consistency, which to the untutored aborigines had the appearance of justice. The motto of the company, meaning "Skin for Skin," indicated clearly the principle of equal treatment of all which the officers of the company invariably observed; and this system conveyed clearly to the primitive minds of the natives the impression that they were being treated with fairness by these officers.

It is astonishing what a hold the Hudson's Bay Company's officers had upon the minds of the Indians of fifty years ago as to justice. The company had no system of cheating the simple and dealing fairly with the cunning Indian. The treatment of its officers was alike to all, with, of course, the interests of the company always well considered.

Under such a system, and with a policy of determined opposition to free trading, it is not astonishing that the growth of trade was slow under the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company. Even the opposition of the Northwest Trading Company, a powerful organization, with its headquarters in Montreal, at last ended in the amalgamation of these two corporations,

and the exercise of their combined power to crush out free trading in the country. Even riotous and almost rebellious acts on the part of the Indians and half-breeds did not break the bonds of monopoly, fur-trading until almost fifty years ago, if not for the benefit of the company, was considered and proclaimed by the officers an illicit traffic.

Under a system like this the trade of the country, outside of that done by the Hudson's Bay Company, even in 1870, when Confederation became a fact, amounted to very little, and Fort Garry, now the City of Winnipeg, in the fall of that year had not more than a dozen small tradesmen's establishments, and a population of not more than 250 people.

In 1870, besides the village which clustered around Fort Garry, and which has since developed into the busy City of Winnipeg, there were no other centres of population in Rupert's Land, excepting a small settlement around the locality where the thriving town of Portage la Prairie now stands. Only at points throughout the country, where Hudson's Bay Company's posts existed, were there even villages of the half-breeds and native whites. Even farming, on a soil so rich as could be found anywhere, was carried on to a very limited extent, so limited that, with the influx of settlement which followed the entry into Confederation, the local food product supply was altogether inadequate for local wants for several years, and heavy importations from the south and east had to be made.

Rupert's Land, therefore, up to its entry into Confederation, was a country practically preserved for the Indian and the operations of the Hudson's Bay Company.

## The Canadian Northwest.

The above caption is the modern name of Rupert's Land, with the portion of Western Ontario from Lake Superior to the eastern Manitoba Boundary added to the area of the latter. This great land has probably more varied resources than any country of equal area in the whole world. Nor is it without a history, although as a mere commercial recorder the writer has not much to do with that.

The portion of the great area east of the Red River Valley is probably one of the greatest fields for geological study in America, and as yet its geological peculiarities, and, it might be truly said, eccentricities, have furnished many a knotty problem for the student of that science. Over these thousands of square miles of country in the volcanic ages there seems to have been a seething anarchical upheaval, which in some places has left the granite formation away above all others, while close beside can be found stretches where the granite is buried deep beneath the depository. Fertility is certainly not one of the features of this country, for its

bread-producing power is limited to narrow streaks and small patches of alluvial soil, usually far apart, and nowhere extensive or possessing the great richness for agricultural purposes so general in the broad prairie land stretching to the westward from the Red River Valley.

Until within the last quarter of a century, the timber resources of the country were considered its only wealth, unless its fur products, and the abundance of fish to be found in its island-dotted lakes. In the past centuries it was never looked upon as a land for white settlement, and was merely the pathway through which French enterprise advanced westward from the St. Lawrence Valley to meet and contend with the British enterprise under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company, which found its way into the great prairie country through the Hudson Bay and the streams which flow into it from the south.

Even the history of this country is little more than a succession of squabbles and sanguinary encounters between the agents of the rival fur trading organizations; and the portion of history furnished by the Indian inhabitants is daubed with equally sanguinary details. It was at the Lake of the Woods, the Lac Christineaux of the last century, that the westward advance of the warlike Chippewa Indians, with the trail of blood and butchery which followed it, came to a permanent halt. For, after exterminating numerous other tribes of Indians in their westward progress through lake and river land in their well-handled canoes, the Chippewas found themselves powerless to advance into the great "yellow land," as they called the prairie land of the west, for there the mounted Sioux bands were more than their match at war on the level plain. The western portion of this land was, therefore, the battle-ground for supremacy in the past between both whites and Indians.

Up to about thirty years ago, therefore, the country from Lake Superior to the eastern regions of the Red River Valley was practically without settlement. The outlet at Fort William, the lake port of the fur-trading interests, was the only village of settlers, and only a number of fur-trading posts existed west of that place. This great stretch of country was so long

It is singular how the mineral wealth of kept from the work of the miner, and the great timber wealth, which was so well-known was so long in being broken upon by the lumbermen. A railway across the country from east to west has built up quite a number of smaller industrial points, while at Rat Portage, on the Lake of the Woods, and the adjoining town of Keewatin, the combined population of the present day numbers between 6,000 and 7,000, and is rapidly increasing as the gold fields of the Lake of the Woods are being prospected and developed. However, the mining and lumbering interests of this region are treated of elsewhere in this pub-