

the adroit and buoyant Frenchman, and the sturdy and energetic Briton were pursuing the less splendid, but hardly less lucrative traffic in furs, and amidst the gigantic forests and perennial snows of the north, laying the foundation, if of a less brilliant and attractive, yet of a more extensive and enduring empire.

These two pursuits have been, in fact, everywhere the pioneers and precursors of civilisation in the New World. 'Without pausing on the borders,' says Washington Irving in his interesting narrative of *Astoria*, 'they have penetrated at once, in defiance of difficulties and dangers, to the heart of savage countries; laying open the hidden secrets of the wilderness, leading the way to remote regions of beauty and fertility, that might have remained unexplored for ages, and beckoning after them the slow and pausing steps of agriculture and civilisation.' It was the fur-trade, in fact, affording early sustenance and vitality to the first English and French settlements in America, which, being destitute of the precious metals, were long neglected by the parent countries, that may with justice be said to have laid the foundation of that magnificent empire, which, whether under the name of the United States or of British America, forms, at this day, the splendid appanage of the Anglo-Saxon race in the New World.

The records of an enterprise marked by so many traits of adventure, privation, and dauntless energy, would doubtless possess many elements of romantic interest; but the exploits of the hardy and adventurous individuals to whom it owes its existence are unchronicled. No Robertson or Prescott has recorded them. Their memory has long passed away with the circumstances of the period and situation which produced them. To bring together what scattered notices are still accessible of the rise, progress, and present condition of this adventurous traffic, and of a state of things which is now fast disappearing, will form an interesting and instructive task, which it is our object to attempt in the following pages.

At the period of the first colonisation of America by Europeans, all that territory which extends eastward from the Mississippi to the Atlantic, and northward from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson's Bay, appears to have been one vast and unbroken forest. This immense area, embracing the greater part of the present United States, and British America east of the great lakes, was then, as a considerable portion of it is still, little more than an extensive haunt of wild beasts. In the security of such undisturbed retreats, these creatures had multiplied incalculably, the few native tribes who roamed over this wilderness, without flocks or tame animals, having left unlimited scope and provision for the animal race, wandering and free like themselves. With few wants, and these easily supplied, it was not until our luxury had led us to adopt the use of furs as costly appendages to dress, that the natives commenced that war of extermination against the animal tribes