

complete extirpation. Fish and wild fowl abounded in the wilderness. The treeless plain regions were coursed at intervals by bottom lands and streams whose banks were well wooded, and the primeval forests kept their awful solitudes. The aborigines, adapting themselves to circumstances, found the supply of all their wants in simply skimming the surface of their domains.

Such was the region, in its furnishings and surroundings, which was put to the service of the chartered Hudson's Bay Company, to be used for much or little, as power and will, opportunity and circumstances, might decide. The legality, wisdom, and rectitude of the company as a business corporation were questioned through its whole extended existence. It would perhaps be difficult to pronounce on the question whether or not it fairly and effectively filled its place of enterprise and influence in the series of efforts and struggles which have opened and enriched the new world. Within its own aims and methods the company certainly must be said to have marvellously prospered. Starting with a capital of £10,500, it has been carefully estimated that it has carried from this country furs which have sold for one hundred and twenty million dollars. But of this more by and by.

Immediately on the receipt of the charter the company began its mercantile operations with energy and zeal. Though setting aside for the present the question of the validity of its charter, reasonable strictures have found forcible expression as to the harm which it suffered from its own narrow and selfish policy. Reference has already been made to the fact that the French traders from Canada, entering the country of furs at another point than the Bay, had begun to find vast profit over the whole northwest territory. The company always aimed to have it appear that the straits and Bay offered the best practicable entrance to the fur region, and discouraged the route through Lake Superior. So the company planted its earliest posts on the margins of the icy coast, at the mouths of the principal rivers. The situation from the first precluded all labors and much profits by tillage of the soil, though in peculiarly favorable seasons a few vegetables were cultivated. With seven or eight months of freezing weather, which bound the earth in frost very deep below the surface, the extreme heat of the brief summer availed only to relax the surface, and this became soft, wet, and marshy. Below three feet of thaw there were fifteen feet of frost. The thermometer in the course of the year had a free range of a hundred and fifty degrees, rising a hundred degrees above and sinking fifty degrees below the freezing point. Even had France been willing to admit the right of the English monarch to confer the chartered territory on his subjects, the relations existing between the two powers would not have allowed a transit to the company through Canada. We shall find that all the subsequent rivalries and contests between the opposing fur companies were prompted and embittered by the conditions under which the Bay Company began its operations and continued them for more