

Memorandum relative to the Origin and Privileges of the Hudson's Bay Company.*

IN 1669, certain British subjects formed themselves into a Company, for the purpose of undertaking an expedition to Hudson's Bay. Memorandum on
Hudson's Bay
Company.

The object of this expedition was two-fold:—

1. To discover a passage through those parts to the Pacific Ocean, or, as it was then oftener called, the South Sea; and

2. To establish a trade in furs, minerals, and other things.

For the encouragement of this enterprise a Royal Charter was granted to the Company on the 2nd May, 1669. By the terms of this Charter, the Company obtained a Royal Grant of the sole trade and commerce of all the seas, streights, bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, and sounds, in whatsoever latitude they should be, lying within the streights commonly called Hudson's Streights, together with all the lands and territories upon the countries, coasts, and confines of the seas, bays, lakes, &c., aforesaid, that were not already actually possessed by the subjects of any other Christian Prince or State. The territory thus acquired was to be thenceforth reckoned and reputed as one of the British Plantations or Colonies in America, to be called Rupert's Land.

For nearly a century after the formation of the Company, they confined their posts to the ample territory which had been granted to them by the Charter of Charles II, and left the task of procuring furs to the enterprise of native hunters, who brought the produce of their hunting to the established marts of the Company.

The Company continued to enjoy, until 1784, the monopoly of the trade in these territories, when a rival Company was established, called the North-West Company, which had their head-quarters at Montreal. The North-West Company, instead of following the system of trade adopted by the Hudson's Bay Company, dispatched their servants into the very recesses of the wilderness to bargain with the native hunters at their homes. As the nearer hunting-grounds became exhausted, the North-West Company advanced their stations westwardly into regions previously unexplored; and, in 1806, they pushed forward a post across the Rocky Mountains, and formed a trading establishment on a lake now called Fraser's Lake, situated in 54° north latitude. This would appear to be the first settlement made by civilized men west of the Rocky Mountains.

Other posts were soon after formed amongst the Flat-head and Kootanie tribes on the head waters or main branch of the Columbia; and Mr. David Thomson, the astronomer of the North-West Company, descended with a party to the mouth of the Columbia in 1811. Mr. Thomson and his followers were, according to Mr. Greenhow, the first white persons who navigated the northern branch of the Columbia, or traversed any part of the country drained by it.

In consequence of the rivalry existing between the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies, which led to frequent conflicts between their respective followers, more particularly with reference to certain settlements formed in the Oregon district by Lord Selkirk, the affairs of the Companies were brought to the notice of Parliament in 1819, and their proceedings were minutely investigated. The Government finally interposed its mediation, and a compromise was effected, by which the North-West Company became merged in the Hudson's Bay Company. Subsequently, and in connection with this arrangement, an "Act for regulating the fur trade and establishing a criminal and civil jurisdiction in

* Referred to in the Statement, page 2, note *.