

cap which he wears and with which he courts the rigours of the climate are the product of our own land. Our furs are the envy of the world, and yet what do we know about them, or what benefit have they been to us more than if they had come from a foreign country? The turning of this natural wealth to the best possible account, having due regard to its conservation and increase, should then become an important question for Canada to deal with.

As is well known, our fur territory is now open; that is to say, it is a free hunting ground for anyone who chooses to go in. Formerly the Hudson Bay Company claimed possession of Rupert's Land by right of a charter granted by Charles II. As a result of investigations by the Imperial Parliament into the resources of what is now Manitoba, and its fitness for settlement, all rights of the company were purchased in 1869 by the Imperial Government, the consideration being £300,000. Since then the fur trade has been carried farther north, to what is now known as the Mackenzie Basin. The Hudson Bay Company, however, are yet virtually the masters of the situation owing to their thorough organization and large amount of capital at their disposal, although they have no monopoly. They have a regular system of trading posts established throughout the entire country to the polar sea, an enterprise which, if report be true, is eminently profitable. Millions of dollars worth of furs are annually sold in Europe from this territory, but the singular part of it is that though Canada is the possessor, she doesn't derive one cent of revenue from it. But it is not only a question of revenue to the Government; it is a question of life and death to the Indians, for their final disappearance from the Continent will probably follow the extinction of the fur-bearing animals. Happily the policy of the Hudson Bay Company has been a very humane one towards the Indians, and the company is also credited with a policy which seeks to prevent a too speedy destruction of the fur-bearing animals, especially in districts where they control the trade; but where they come in contact with other traders there is a wanton destruction and the traffic with the Indians is carried on in a most degrading fashion. As competitors press into the North, as they inevitably will if allowed, a very short time will elapse until we shall have to lament the entire destruction of our fur trade, and with this we shall probably be forced to face an "Indian problem" in its direst and most dreadful phase. There is no guarantee under free trading in furs that the bloody feuds between the rival fur companies in the early days of the Red River Settlement, into which the Indians were drawn, will not be repeated on a far greater scale in the farther north. The Hudson Bay Company is not a philanthropic institution by any means: it is a purely business concern and a well and honourably conducted business as far as their dealings with the aborigines are concerned. True they have endeavoured to keep the country in the dark and prevent its settlement, but where is the Company that would do otherwise under similar circumstances? It is true that a work of Sir George Simpson was suppressed by the Company because it spoke of the country as being fit for settlement, and Sir George was afterwards compelled to eat his own words when he became a stockholder in the Company. But whatever may be the ultimate destiny of the great Mackenzie Basin, Canada has a manifest duty to perform—to protect the riches there, not only for their great commercial importance but also for the sake of the Indians, who but a few years ago held undisputed sway over the entire Continent of America, and of whose sad history the last chapter will soon be written.

The Select Committee of the Senate which sat during the late session of Parliament on the resources of the great Mackenzie Basin has done good service to the country in drawing attention to our great northern reserve. In the report which they presented to the House they recommended amongst other things the leasing of our fur bearing territory. I have thought it would be instructive as well as interesting at this time to give the following information relative to Alaska, since its acquisition in 1867 by the United States, which I have gleaned from the works of various writers and travellers.

When Secretary Seward's proposal for the purchase of Russian America was taking definite shape the wits found it an excellent subject upon which to spend their surplus supply of humour and ridicule. The territory was characterized as a "land of valuable snow and merchantable ice; its chief products were icebergs and furs, and the future settler would cultivate his fields with snowploughs!" The treaty was called "the Polar Bear Treaty," "the Esquimaux Acquisition Treaty." It was proposed to call the new territory "Walussia," "American Siberia," "Zero Islands," and "Polario." Of the Secretary of State's dinner parties at this time one wicked scribe wrote, "there was roast treaty, boiled treaty, treaty in bottles, treaty in decanters, treaty in statistics, treaty in military point of view, treaty clad in furs, ornamented with walrus teeth, fringed with timber and flopping with fish. Icebergs on toast, etc." The following extract from a Democratic newspaper will give an idea of the strong opposition that was encountered: "Congress is not willing to take \$10,000,000 from the treasury to pay for the Secretary of State's questionable distinction of buying a vast uninhabitable desert with which to cover the thousand mortifications and defeats which have punished the pilotage of Andrew Jackson through his shipwreck policy of reconstruction. The Treaty has a clause binding us to exercise jurisdiction over the territory and give government to 40,000 inhabitants now crawling over it in snowshoes. Without a cent of revenue to be derived from it we will have to keep regiments of soldiers and six men-of-war up there and institute territorial government. No energy of the American people will be sufficient to make mining speculation profitable in 60° north latitude. Ninety-nine one-hundredths of the territory are absolutely worthless." However, in spite of opposition the Treaty was ratified and the United States became possessed of the territory. It embraced an area of 580,107 square miles, the con-

sideration being \$7,200,000, or less than two cents an acre. It has been charged that this territory has been lost to Canada through England's inactivity or neglect. This is scarcely correct; England did desire to become possessed of it, and made overtures to Russia to buy it, but Russia was unwilling that England should become possessed of a second Gibraltar; they preferred that it should fall into the hands of United States. That this quiet and peaceful conquest, generalised by Mr. Seward, and which cut off Canada's nose so to speak, has been a valuable one to the United States is now abundantly proven.

After the bargain was sealed and the gold paid over to Russia, capitalists in the United States immediately turned their attention to their new acquisition, which then received the name of Alaska or *unknown land*, and satisfied themselves that there were other resources there than icebergs and snow. The Alaska Commercial Company was formed which secured a lease from the United States Government for twenty years, which gave them a monopoly over the territory. This arrangement has proved so satisfactory to both parties that the Government is making nearly ten per cent. yearly on their investment, and the company is said to be rolling in wealth. The two tiny islands, St. Paul and St. George, called the Seal Islands, are themselves paying yearly four per cent. on the money invested in the purchase of the whole territory. The wisdom of the United States in leasing these possessions to a responsible company is evident in another way: Not only do they derive a large revenue from them, but under the wise provisions of the lease the wealth of the territory is not diminishing, but is yearly increasing. In the case of the seal fisheries of the islands referred to, the lessees, the Alaska Commercial Company, are restricted to a catch of 100,000 seals a year, and under this limitation it is said that the seals are increasing in numbers, while at the same time the company is "riding on fortune's topmost wave." By the time the present lease expires, which will be in 1890, there bids fair to be a lively scramble as to who shall secure the next lease, and undoubtedly the Government will be able to make better terms for themselves. These fisheries are the more important since the Alaska seal is now the only seal in the market, the seals in other parts of the world, having had no government protection, have been so persistently hunted that they have now become practically extinct. From the islands of South Georgia and Desolation, 2,400,000 were annually taken until within the last twenty years, when a seal can scarcely be seen there. It is said a San Francisco furrier sent a schooner down a few years ago and only three seals were taken. Of course it will be remembered that the seal is only one, although the most important, fur-bearing animal in Alaska, this single inhabitant of icebergs bringing into the United States treasury about \$300,000 annually, besides adding to the comfort and adornment of human beings in different parts of the world.

The history of Alaska affords an instructive lesson to Canada in dealing with her own northern reserve. Her fur territory is perhaps three times larger than Alaska in area, and many times more valuable. It is there that all the finer furs of commerce, with perhaps the exception of the seal, are found. The Hudson Bay Company, that gigantic, rich, mysterious corporation, have for two centuries been the real possessors of this territory. They alone can tell the real value of these possessions. The history of the H. B. Co. would be the history of the North-West part of Canada. Mr. H. M. Robinson, in *The Great Fur Land*, gives the following figures relative to the extent of the trade of the Company:

Of Pine Marten, or Hudson Bay Sable, the annual export of the Company is 120,000 skins; of the Fisher, 12,000; of the Mink, 250,000; Raccoon, 520,000; Red Fox, 50,000; Cross Fox, 45,000; Silver Fox, 1,000; Beaver, 60,000; Wolf, 15,000; Land Otter, 17,000; Wolverine, 1,200; Bear, 9,000; besides hundreds of thousands of rabbits, and perhaps 2,000,000 musk-rats. The Marten is the most important in the list. Its value is given at \$15. Fisher, the same price. It passes current that in former days the trade value of a musket was as many Marten skins piled up as would reach the muzzle of the gun standing on its butt. It is evident that in this case the poor Indian was sadly worsted in the trade. The Mink which was at one time so fashionable and which was nearly exterminated on that account, is not much sought for now. The Beaver, whose covering is worth about \$10, is one of the staple articles of commerce. Although the Beaver trade is still enormous, a number of years ago when it was exclusively used in felt and other hats nearly three times the number were annually exported, and had the fashion not changed by the introduction of silk for the same use, it is more than probable that the Beaver would have been exterminated. The Silver and Cross fox have the most valuable fur, their covering being worth from \$40 to \$50. Nothing is here said of the Buffalo, the Musk Ox, and other less important fur-bearing animals, but the above are the staples.

We have seen how the Buffalo has been ruthlessly hunted until now it is almost extinct so far as its commercial value is concerned. Naturalists search for their bones where not more than a decade ago the Buffalo roamed in countless thousands, attracting the daring hunter from distant parts of the world, who strewed the plains with carcasses, leaving them to rot while he sped on the exciting and bloody chase. It would have been an easy matter to have put some check upon the wholesale slaughter of the Buffalo when they were in their prime, which would have preserved them; and that this small trouble and expense would have been abundantly repaid is now only too evident.

The Musk Ox is an animal but little known, inhabiting the extreme north. It is a good deal like the Buffalo in size and shape, and has a valuable robe with long shaggy hair. It is to be hoped that this animal which is said to be a very beautiful and interesting one, will not share the fate of the Buffalo.

Galt.

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