

SEVENTEEN YEARS IN THE CANADIAN NORTH-WEST.

BY

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It is difficult to understand how a country so vast in extent and rich in resources as that now known as the Canadian North-West should have so long escaped the attention of the civilised world. For ages those fertile territories lay dormant—a great wilderness of waste, unknown except to the red man and the fur trader; and only now is the value and importance of North-Western Canada beginning to dawn upon the minds of people on this side of the Atlantic.

Perhaps, if we take a slight glance at the early history of the country, we may be able to discover some reason for this long and singular absence of development in a land which is now found to be teeming with fruitfulness. In 1670 (over two hundred years ago) Prince Rupert, with a number of English noblemen and gentlemen, succeeded in obtaining a charter from Charles II., the ostensible object of which, as then stated, was to push trade in the direction of the North Pole, and to find, if possible, a new passage to the South Sea. The practical effect of the charter, however, was to secure to Prince Rupert and his colleagues proprietary rights over a considerable portion of the North-West. The validity of the charter has been frequently questioned, on the ground that at the time it was granted the country did not belong to England, but to France. This was the commencement of that great corporation, the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1700 fur traders from France are known to have penetrated the country as far as the Assiniboine Valley, and in 1784 the North-West Company of Montreal was formed. The Hudson's Bay Company, therefore, in spite of their charter, did not have things all their own way, and naturally a fierce spirit of rivalry sprang up between them and the other companies interested in the fur trade. So strong, indeed, became the competition that it resulted in great loss of property and life in the frequent conflicts that took place; and this state of affairs lasted till 1820, when a fusion of the different fur companies was effected,