

The Hudson's Bay Company and Mr. Julian Ralph.

BY ARCHER MARTIN

EVERY Canadian, or at least every Northwest Canadian, who takes an intelligent interest in the history of his country, will gladly welcome every contribution from the pen of any one at all qualified to write on the rise and progress of that great company which gave its name to, and is so inseparably bound up with the vast plantation of Rupert's Land; that is, so long as such contribution possess the qualifications of originality and accuracy. If it does not possess the first of these requirements it is tedious and unprofitable as a literary production; if it lacks the latter, then it is not only valueless but distinctly harmful from any point of view.

Even a cursory consideration of a recent article in *Harpers' Magazine*, for February, entitled, "A Skin for a Skin," by Mr. Julian Ralph, shows that it is open to both the above objections.

So far as regards the first, it may be dismissed shortly by saying that Mr. Ralph has drawn almost exclusively and in an injudicious manner on the well-known Parliamentary Reports of 1749 and 1819, to which he refers, and jogging along this much travelled track, has nothing new to present to readers who are at all familiar with the subject.

The article, in many respects, much resembles one entitled, "The Romantic Story of a Great Corporation," which appeared a little over two years ago in the *Cosmopolitan*, and was written by Mr. J. M. Oxley. The illustrations, from the facile pencil of Mr. F. Remington, as a whole are excellent, though it is evident from the foxy and ragged curs depicted on page 381 as huskey dogs, that the artist is not familiar with this fine animal; and from the truly wonderful canoe on page 393, that Mr. Remington is more at home on the plains than he is on the lakes and rivers of Rupert's Land. The illustrations in the *Cosmopolitan* are of more permanent value, as they represent actual places of interest.

As regards the second of the essentials above referred to, Mr. Ralph is still more unfortunate. He begins by stating that the "head offices of the great corporation" are in Winnipeg, instead of London, and ends by transforming the old friend of the *voyageur*, the tump-line, so known to "Webster's Unabridged," into "tomp-line," which is a stranger to us. Passing over the incorrect description of the armorial bearings of the ancient company, what shall we say of the unhappy reference to Johnny *Craveau* (!) on page 380, or the delightfully unconscious manner in which the writer persistently speaks of the *courrier (sic) du bois*, instead of the *coureur du bois*, all through his paper? Had he glanced at Washington Irving's charming "Astoria," or the *Cosmopolitan* even, he would not have committed this inexcusable error.

Historically, he errs from the beginning, for though in the report of 1749 he had a copy of the Company's charter before him as he wrote, yet he gives the date of it as 1672 instead of 1670, May 2nd; nor is he apparently quite sure of the date he *does* give, for on another page 392, he fixes the present age of the Company as 230 years, which would make the date of the grant of the charter 1662, or eight years worse than before. Mr. Oxley, at least, got this important date correct in his article. Nor is he more reliable when he says that the charter was given as a reward for efforts made, and to be made to find the North-West Passage. This was only one of the causes for the grant, which goes on to say, in the quaint language of the day, "and for the finding of some trade in furs, minerals and other considerable commodities."

Mr. Ralph does not appear to have a high opinion of the geographical attainments of the readers of *Harper's* or he would not have stated that "England had offered £20,000 reward to whosoever should find the bothersome passage to the southern seas *via the North Pole*" (!) The Act, 18 Geo. ii, Cap 17, A. D., 1745, offered that reward to any of His Majesty's subjects who should find the passage "through Hudson's Straights to the Western and Southern Ocean of America," and the framers of the statute apparently realized the fact, differing in this respect