

passed, they shrieked, and plunged for ever into the abyss of mist!

Notwithstanding the life of continued exertion, peril, and excitement which they lead, there is no class of men, according to Captain Bonneville, who are more enamoured of their occupation than the free-trappers of the West. No toil, no danger, no privation, can turn the trapper from his pursuit: his passionate excitement at times resembles a mania. In vain may the most vigilant and cruel savages beset his path; in vain may rocks and precipices and wintry torrents oppose his progress; let but a single track of a beaver meet his eye, and he forgets all dangers and defies all difficulties. At times he may be seen with his traps on his shoulder, buffeting his way across rapid streams, amidst floating blocks of ice; at other times, he is to be found with his traps swung on his back, clambering over the most rugged mountains, scaling or descending the most frightful precipices, searching by routes inaccessible to the horse, and never before trodden by white man, for springs and lakes unknown to his comrades, and where he may meet with his favourite game. Such is the hardy trapper of the American fur-trade, and such is the wild Robin-Hood kind of life, with all its strange and motley populace, now existing in full vigour on the mountains and in the vast prairies stretching along the border territories of the Far West.

The Hudson's Bay Company are not partial to the employment of this class, whose notions of trade and fair profits are but little suited to the latitude of Hudson's Bay, and employ them at all only when the encroachments of the American Fur Companies along the frontiers render it necessary to oppose them with their own weapons. The establishments of the Company on the prairie region, and the frontier parts of the Oregon Territory, are kept up at little or no profit, and frequently at a considerable loss, from the high prices it is necessary to pay for the furs, to prevent or crush competition. The establishments are useful, however, as depôts for collecting provisions—being situated in the heart of the buffalo country—for the use of the famished but profitable districts in the north, whence, as already stated, the principal portion of the furs is derived. The produce of the prairie districts consists chiefly of the coarser kinds of furs—such as the wolf, fox, and lynx, and the buffalo-ropes, which are obtained in immense quantities, and fetch a high price in the markets of Canada and the United States, where they are much prized for wrappers for winter-travelling and sledge-driving.

The district referred to in the geographical sketch as the Barren Grounds, is almost valueless for the purposes of the fur-trade. The only inhabitants are the Esquimaux, who live chiefly by fishing along the coast, and trade in oil, feathers, seal-skins, and ivory at the few posts which have hitherto been established in that part of the country.

It has been remarked, that the policy of the Hudson's Bay