

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LORD STRATHCONA AND THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY.

DONALD ALEXANDER SMITH, Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, was born at Ferres, Scotland, in 1820, and came to Canada in 1838, when eighteen years old, seeking in this country what he could not have attained in the land of his birth. For nearly thirty years he served the Hudson Bay Company, the hardest task-master the white man has ever known. At the bidding of the Company he endured hardships so painful and so terrible that he cannot now, with the halcyon days of prosperity and highest honors awarded him, venture to recall those days of hardship and peril.

After ten years of service he was promoted to be agent on the bleak coast of Labrador. Almost made blind by the snow of that region, on the verge of the Atlantic where the supply ship came only once a year, with two Indians he tramped two thousand miles to Montreal for help, to be told by Governor Simpson to go back to his post. Before the last two hundred miles of that desolate return his faithful Indians died from exhaustion, fear and hunger, and he stumbled into the Post alone. Such was the rule of the Hudson Bay Company in the yesterdays of the past, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Such it would have been in the future years which we call tomorrow if the presence of that statesman, George Brown, had not silenced the strife of years in the great Confederation of 1867.

In those thirty years, his experience under the iron rule of the Hudson Bay Company, developed his genius and ability for the government of men. His leisure moments were spent in reading with careful study. By these steps he rose from the foot to the topmost rung of the Company's ladder, becoming chief executive, with home offices in Montreal. Saving and thrifty he became a rich man. When it became an acknowledged fact that the Northwest was to be the limit of investigation, it was for him to make the terms which closed their iron rule, opening its fertile plains to the plough and reaper, to bring the golden wheat that feeds the millions of America and Europe. Through his guidance the conflicting interests of the Government, the Company, the Indians, and the half-breeds the rebellion was settled, to make the Canadian Northwest the highway of Europe and Asia.