

the main, and almost the sole, source of the Company's strength; but it was at first expected that a valuable property in mines, and other sources of wealth, might accrue from the exertions of the agents of the Company. Hence there were not only numerous "factories," "forts," or trading posts established in the Indian country westward and southward of Hudson's Bay, but expeditions were despatched into remoter regions, to ascertain the real nature of the country. These expeditions, while they have furnished conspicuous incidents in the Company's history, have at the same time most powerfully aided in the exploration of the northern coasts of America, and in the settlement of many important problems relating to the "north-west passage."

A search for copper was one of the earliest proceedings of the Company, independent of their fur-trading. The natives who range over the large tract of land lying north-west of Hudson's Bay, having repeatedly brought to the Company's factories samples of copper, many of the Company's servants conjectured that the copper was found not far from their settlements; and as the Indians stated that the mines were not very distant from a large river, it was generally supposed that this river must empty itself into Hudson's Bay. At length in the year 1719, an expedition, consisting of two vessels under the command of Mr. Knight, was sent out from England, with orders to explore Hudson's Bay with a view to discover this supposed river, or any mineral riches which might fall in their way. The feeling with which the undertaking was entered on, may be judged from the fact that Knight took with him some large iron-bound chests to hold gold-dust, and other valuable commodities. Poor Knight and his companions were lost, by shipwreck or otherwise, on the coast; but it was not until nearly forty years afterwards, that the Company gained any intimation of the ships, or the fate of the crew, by seeing on a desolate shore guns, anvils, cables, anchors, &c., belonging to the missing ships, together with vestiges of a house built by the crews on shore. The Company sent a ship annually to the northern part of Hudson's Bay, to traffic with the natives for furs, to make observations on the surrounding country, and to search for their lost companions.

In 1742, and again in 1746, expeditions were fitted out by the Company, for exploring the north-west regions, having for one object the discovery of a passage into the Pacific; but without success. At length in 1768 an event occurred which led to the daring expedition of Samuel Hearne. Some Indians who came to trade at Prince William's Fort, brought further accounts of a "grand river," as it was called, and also several pieces of copper, as samples of the produce of a mine near it. This induced the Company to send out an enterprising man, to trace the river to its mouth, when he had once encountered it in any part of its course, to make a chart of the district he might walk through, and to observe well the nature of the country. Hearne was chosen for this purpose, as being a man of great hardihood and sagacity, bred in the employment of the Company, and possessed of a sufficient knowledge of the elements of science to understand the general character of the country and its features.

Hearne set off from Hudson's Bay on the 6th November, 1769, accompanied by two Englishmen and ten Indians. He was provided with ammunition for two years, some necessary iron instruments, a few knives, tobacco, and other useful articles. His wardrobe was simple enough; consisting of the clothes he wore, one spare coat, as much cloth as would make two or three pairs of Indian stockings, and a blanket for his bed. No sooner, however, did the expedition penetrate a little way into the country, than the Indians proved treacherous and left him, thus obliging him to find his way back again to the fort.

After making new and more careful arrangements, Hearne set off again with a new party in February of the following year, 1770, and made a second journey, which proved more disastrous than the first. He was plundered of everything by some Indians whom he met; and after enduring almost incredible hardships, he returned once more to the fort in November, after an absence of eight months. Nothing daunted by what he had undergone, he again offered his services; and on the 7th of December set off on that expedition which, from the light it threw on the geography of the northern parts of America, has gained for him so much renown, and which took him away from the dwellings of civilized man for more than eighteen months. We feel it necessary, in detailing the proceedings of the Hudson's Bay Company, to notice an enterprise so remarkable as this;

but the adventures partake too much of the character of Arctic exploration to demand more than a slight notice here. At the earnest recommendation of an Indian chief, Hearne, singular as it may appear, consented that several Indian women should be of the party; and he had no cause to regret this arrangement. The reasons which the chief gave for this suggestion were these:—"In an expedition of this kind, when all the men are so heavily laden, that they can neither hunt nor travel to any considerable distance, in case they meet with success in hunting, who is to carry the produce of their labour? Women were made for labour; one of them can carry or haul as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, and in fact there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance, or for any length of time, in this country without them; and yet, though they do everything, they are maintained at a trifling expense; for, as they always act the cook, the very licking of their fingers in scarce time is sufficient for their subsistence."

As deer-skins form part of the traffic of the fur-hunters and dealers, and the flesh furnishes a welcome food in the wilds of these regions, we may fittingly notice the mode adopted by the Indians who accompanied Hearne, to kill a number of deer by one stratagem, and which is generally followed by the Indians. Their mode of accomplishing this is to select a well-frequented deer-path, and enclose with a strong fence of twisted trees and brushwood a space a mile or more in circumference. The entrance of this inclosure or pound is not more than a common gate, and its interior is crowded with innumerable small hedges, in the openings of which are fixed snares of strong well-twisted thongs. One end is generally fastened to a growing tree; and as all the wood and jungle within the enclosure is left standing, it forms a complete labyrinth. On each side of the entrance, a line of small trees, set up in the snow fifteen or twenty yards apart, form two sides of an acute angle, widening gradually from the entrance, from which they sometimes extend two or three miles. Between these rows of brush-wood runs the path frequented by the deer. When all things are prepared, the Indians take their station on some eminence, commanding a prospect of this path, and the moment any deer are seen going that way, the whole encampment, men, women, and children, steal under cover of the wood till they get behind them. They then show themselves in the open ground, and drawing up in the form of a crescent, advance shouting. The deer, finding themselves pursued, and at the same time, imagining the rows of bushy poles to be people stationed to prevent their passing on either side, run straight forward till they get into the pound. The Indians instantly close in, block up the entrance, and whilst the women and children run round the outside to prevent the deer from breaking, or leaping the fence, the men enter with their spears and bows, and speedily despatch such as are caught in the snares or are running loose. Buffaloes are entrapped in a way almost precisely similar, as is related by Sir John Franklin in the narrative of his journey to the Arctic Ocean through the fur-hunting regions.

With respect to the result of Hearne's journey, we may state that he reached the "Coppermine River," respecting which so much had been said, on the 14th of July, after about seven months' foot travelling, diversified by all those incidents which such a mode of travelling, and in such a country, are likely to produce. He first saw the river near its mouth, and ascertained the important fact that the stream empties itself into an ocean, the existence of which, northward of America, had never before been clearly proved. As to the much vaunted copper-mines, Hearne found that they were nothing more than chaotic masses of rock and gravel, rent by an earthquake or some other convulsion into numerous fissures, exhibiting here and there very sparing specimens of copper-ore, wholly unworthy of the trouble of collection, even in a more favourable locality.

While these enterprises were going on on the part of the Company's agents, the traffic in furs continued uninterrupted, though fluctuating in extent according to circumstances. The mode of traffic was nearly analogous to that pursued by the "North-West Company," described in the last paper. The Hudson's Bay Company had a chief station in the western shore of the bay, at which the affairs with the Company in London were managed; and from this station as a centre, others were gradually established to the west, north-west, and south-west of it. Many of these were situated at a vast distance from the parent station, and were inhabited by a few agents who carried on barter with the