

INTRODUCTION.

IN the year 1670 a charter was granted by Charles the Second to the Hudson's-Bay Company, whose first governor was Prince Rupert, by which the Company was allowed the exclusive privilege of establishing trading factories on the shores of that noble bay and its tributary rivers. Owing to this charter, the fur-trade, which forms an important and extensive branch of American commerce, was for a long period monopolized by the Company; but, from the peculiar nature of its constitution, little progress was made by its officers in extending its trading posts, or exploring the interior, until the year 1770, when Mr. Hearne was sent on an expedition to the Arctic Sea, for an account of which I beg to refer the reader to that gentleman's simple and interesting narrative.

While Canada belonged to France the Canadian traders had advanced many hundred miles beyond Lake Superior, and established several trading posts in the heart of the country, some of which the *voyageurs* still call by their original names; such as Fort Dauphin, Fort Bourbon, and others.

The conquest of that province opened a new source of trade to British enterprise; and while the officers of the Hudson's-Bay Company fancied their charter had secured them in the undisturbed possession of their monopoly, an active and enterprising rival was gradually encroaching on their territories, and imperceptibly undermining their influence with the Indians; I allude to the North-West Fur Company of Canada, which originally consisted of a few private traders, but subsequently became the first commercial establishment in British America.

It is not here necessary to enter into a detail of the formation and increase of this Company. Its first members were British and Canadian merchants; among whom Messrs. Rocheblave, Frobisher, Fraser, M'Tavish, Mackenzie, and M'Gillivray were the most prominent. Their clerks were chiefly younger branches of respectable Scottish families, who entered the service as apprentices for seven years; for which period they were allowed one hundred pounds, and suitable clothing. At the expiration of their apprenticeship they were placed on yearly salaries, varying from eighty to one hundred and sixty pounds, and according to their talents were ultimately provided for as partners;