

HOW THE FRENCH CAPTURED FORT NELSON.

By Beckles Willson.

NOTE.—In the May and June numbers Mr. Willson describes the founding of York Factory, the Exploits of Radisson and Groseilliers, and some later events in the life of the former of these two bushrangers. The events here described happened at a later date, but this piece of the history of "The Great Company" shows how intense was the rivalry of the French and the English traders even in those northern regions. These three articles on The Hudson's Bay Co. are advanced chapters from Mr. Willson's forth-coming book.

THE French prisoners captured in the Hudson's Bay Company's expedition of 1696 suffered an incarceration of nearly four months duration at Portsmouth. Hardly had their liberty been regained than they boarded a French brig bound for Havre, and on arrival in Paris, lost little time in making known the condition of affairs at Hudson's Bay. Louis and his Ministers, gazing upon this emaciated band of traders and bushrangers, could hardly refrain from immediate action to retrieve the situation. Precisely following the tactics of their enemy in the previous year, they engaged four men-of-war; which fleet was despatched to join Iberville, then at the port of Placentia, in Newfoundland. The Court was well aware that there was no one man so thoroughly equipped at all points in knowledge of the bay, and the conditions there of life and warfare, as this hero. Consequently, although numerous enough, all other offers to lead the expedition were rejected.

On the arrival of the French ships at Placentia, Iberville took command, embarking in the *Pelican*, of fifty guns. The others were the *Palmier*, the *Weesph*, the *Profond*, and the *Violent*.

But Fort Nelson was not to be captured without a struggle.

At almost the very moment the French fleet sailed, there departed from Plymouth four of the Company's ships, the *Hampshire*, the *Hudson's Bay*, the *Dering*, and *Owner's Love*, a fire-ship, the two former having been participants in the conquest of the previous year. The Company's

fleet entered the straits only forty hours before the ships of the French; and like them was much impeded by the ice, which was unusually troublesome. Passage was made by the enemy in the English wake. The *Profond*, commanded by Duque, pushed past the currents, taking a northerly course, which brought her commander into full view of two of the Company's ships. Shots were exchanged, but owing to the difficulties engendered by the ice, it was impossible to manœuvre with such certainty as to cut off the Frenchman's escape. While this skirmish was in progress, Iberville in the *Pelican* succeeded in getting past the English unknown to them, and reached the mouth of the Nelson River in sight of the fort. His presence, as may be imagined, greatly surprised and disturbed the Governor and the Company's servants; for they had believed their own ships would have arrived in season to prevent the enemy from entering the straits. Several rounds of shot were fired as a signal, in the hope that a response would be made by the Company's ships, which they expected hourly in that quarter.

In his turn the French commander was equally disturbed by the non-arrival of his three consorts, which the exigencies of the voyage had obliged him to abandon. Two days passed in a state of suspense. At daybreak on the fifth of September three ships* were distinctly visible; both parties

*The fourth, the fire-ship *Owner's Love*, was never more heard of. It is supposed that, separated from the others, she ran into the ice and was sunk, with all on board.