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NARRATIVE AND CRITICAL HISTORY OF AMERICA

CHAPTER I.

THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY.¹

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THE most lavish liberality or generosity exhibited in this world of men is shown in the bestowal of a gift which does not belong to the donor of it. In such cases there is generally a very slight knowledge, if not an absolute ignorance, of the quality and value of the gift; so the terms of it are likely to be not only very general but very loose and vague. Indeed, part of the charm of such a gift will consist in the undefined possibilities, the imagined revelations, which may go with it. The burdens and responsibilities attending the acceptance of it, and the trespasses upon the rights of others, the injuries likely to be inflicted upon them, and the struggles, animosities, and controversies, with the risk of final discomfiture, in the maintenance of such a possession, are either not taken into account, or are winked out of sight.

These familiar truths were signally illustrated, on a very grand scale too, in the gifts made by ecclesiastics and monarchs of the old world of expanses of territory on this western hemisphere, when opened by the early navigators. Under the latest advances of astronomical science, spaces in the moon might now be almost as definitely assigned to claimants for them as were the regions of this new world. Before it was known whether what had been discovered here were an island, an archipelago, or a continent, it was made over in a lump by the Pope to the monarchs of Spain. It was under the famous Bull of Demarcation that Spain was shortly after, by a convention with Portugal, forced to divide to a small extent with that power. Notwithstanding such papal partiality,² Francis of France soon claimed his

¹ [Dr. Ellis has given a summary of this chapter in the *Bulletin of the Amer. Geog. Soc.*, 1886, No. 2, pp. 127-136 — Ed.]

² [See Vol. II. — Ed.]