

the fluctuating character of the drainage, and the embarrassing nature of the proofs presented, might hardly seem to warrant. Indeed, for several years, the course of geographical inquiry had no more ardent enthusiasts than the two great Firms whose chief business lay in peltries and blankets. Mr. Hearne, an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, had, in 1771, followed down the Coppermine River to its mouth on the Arctic Ocean; and, indeed, was the first explorer to prove the existence of an ocean boundary to the north of the American continent. His papers and charts, however, were withheld for nearly twenty years from publication. During the interval, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, an officer of the great rival Company, selecting the largest outlet from Slave Lake, descended to the same shores by the river which now bears his name. Beyond the Rocky Mountains, too, rival explorers traced the eastern streams to their distant sources, or followed down the western streams to their mouths on the Pacific. Mr. Fraser, an officer of the North-west Company, followed down the stream which, in after years, the first discovery of gold in British Columbia brought into such notoriety; and the Simpson derives its name from a late governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. It would have been well had the rival zeal of these two great Companies always gone hand in hand with the cause of geographical discovery. But, unfortunately, the arguments of the compass and the chart were often abandoned for those of the rifle and the tomahawk. The Indian, too, was found to be a weapon even more murderous and unerring than either, and not infrequently his cupidity was aroused, and his brain set on fire, when exclusive possession of some trading district was to be gained, or some rival fort to be exterminated. These unhappy years of strife were at length brought to a close, in 1821, by the union of these two great Companies. And a rapid glance at the terms of this union may, perhaps, more fully prepare us for the main subject of our inquiry.

The North-West Company merged into the Hudson's Bay Company. The servants, property, and forts of the two associations became henceforth the servants, property, and forts of the older association, and the stockholders of the North-West Company became stockholders of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Charter of Charles II.—whatever be the powers and privileges which it conferred—was the only legal recognition which the Hudson's Bay Company had hitherto possessed. The North-West Company possessed no recognised territorial powers whatever. But the forts of the two united Companies now stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the disputed Oregon