

ON TRAIL AND RAPID BY DOG-SLED AND CANOE

CHAPTER I

ROMANCE OF EXPLORATION

THE progress of civilization and Christianity in the Canadian North-West, as in many other parts of the world, is due in a large measure to great fur-trading companies. With a wonderful devotion to the cause in hand, they pushed beyond the bounds of civilization and entered regions never before trodden by white man. They built forts, gained the respect of savage tribes, and ruled them with a firm hand. By their boats missionaries travelled over the noble streams into the wilderness, ministered to the natives who gathered round the forts, and received supplies from the companies' stores.

As friction between bodies produces heat, fire, and light, so, by the rivalry of fur-trading companies, the northland of Canada was opened up, and a new era ushered in. Eager to outstrip one another, they were ever pushing farther and farther into the country, and, as has been well said, "the great explorers of the period (1763-1812) were all connected with the fur trade."

Away to the north stretched a region, a land of wonder and strange stories. Indians told of a "great river" in the far North-West, and showed specimens of copper found along its banks. The Hudson's Bay Company, acting upon these reports, decided to make a thorough investigation, with the