

FUR-TRADE AND THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

CESSION OF CANADA, AND RISE OF THE NORTH-WEST COMPANY.

It is doubtful whether the Hudson's Bay Company could have long survived the stormy crisis of 1748, under their original constitution, but for the opportune breaking out of the great Colonial War with France, which, among other results, produced, under the splendid administration of the elder Pitt, the conquest and cession of Canada to the English. A new direction was thus given to the enterprise of British subjects, by the abandonment into their hands of the extensive traffic with the Indians, established and so long successfully conducted by the French. An interval of several years elapsed, however, owing probably to an ignorance of the country in the conquerors, and their want of commercial confidence in the conquered, before the new adventurers were able to take full advantage of the opening thus afforded them. There were, indeed, other discouragements—such as the immense length of the journeys necessary to reach the limits where the traffic could be profitably undertaken; the risk of property from the hostility of the natives towards the new-comers; and an ignorance of the language of those who, from their experience, must be necessarily employed as the intermediate agents between them and the Indians. It was not until the year 1766 that the trade regained its old channels; but it was then pursued with much avidity and emulation by individual traders, and soon overstepped its former bounds. In 1781, it had reached the limits of Lake Athabasca, nearly 1000 miles beyond the most distant point attained by the French. The Hudson's Bay Company, in the meantime, pursuing their former inactive policy, had remained nearly stationary round the shores of the Bay; but, alarmed at the progress of the Canadian traders, they quickly perceived that against opponents whom no territorial limits could restrain within the bounds of their French predecessors, a more energetic course of action was essential to the existence of even their own limited trade. About the year 1774, they accordingly made their first considerable move to the westward, and henceforth adopted the policy of vigorously contesting the trade with their Canadian rivals.

An animated competition now commenced between the contending parties, imbittered as usual by rivalries and jealousies, and the petty artifices employed to outbid and undermine each other with the Indians. Spirituous liquors, the issue of which under the French government had been strictly prohibited, were now introduced as an article of traffic—first by the traders from the Bay, when, in self-defence, the Canadians were compelled to do the same. The result was, in a short time, the utter disorganisation of the trade, and the demoralisation not only of the natives but of the traders themselves.

To put an end to the scandalous and ruinous contentions arising