

the lake system are not without their bewildering changes. Through the more level districts, it is difficult to say which way their deep sluggish waters are flowing. At fords, and shallower portions of their watercourses, springs, rising in the beds of the streams, may be found contributing their currents both ways, at the same time. Immense reservoirs of water, too, stored beneath the surface, sometimes burst up through the channels of these streams, and quite alter their courses. But the greatest vicissitudes are due to the seasons. And these are sometimes grand and terrific in the extreme. Many of these great watercourses, in the more high latitudes, become frozen to the depth of several feet. With the opening spring, their many tributaries, swollen with melted snows, and plunging madly down the steep slopes of the Rocky Mountains, pour their foaming torrents into the main channel. For some time the struggle is immense. At length the solid ice is rent asunder with the bellowing of thunder; and, broken piecemeal, clashing, tumbling, jarring, in a boiling sea, it retires sullenly down stream until it accumulates in sufficient quantity to form an impregnable wall. Here mass is elevated on mass, until the solid barrier is raised to some fifty or sixty feet above the ordinary level of the stream. In the meantime, the waters spread rapidly over the surrounding country, converting it into a wide and deep sea, and seldom retiring until they have made considerable changes in the water communication of the district.

These peculiar features of the country were not lost upon so pushing and energetic a body as the North-West Company. If the Chartered Association could point to the great inland seas—the broad rivers, which communicated with their bay, the new Company was not slow to discover equally great inland seas—equally broad rivers, discharging their waters within the Arctic Circle. The possession of the vast North-Western districts was assumed to hang upon the results of geographical exploration, and its progress was watched by the shareholders and officers of these two great associations with the keenest scrutiny. What lakes really did communicate with each other—whence the main streams derived their sources,—and whether they ultimately found their way to the Atlantic seaboard, or discharged themselves into the Arctic Ocean, became invested with a curious importance. The possession of vast hunting fields was assumed to depend on the course of a stream, the outlet of a lake, even the breaking up of a hard frost. The whole of these immense regions, even far within the Arctic Circle, were explored with a persistence and devotion to the service of each Company, which their dreary landscape,