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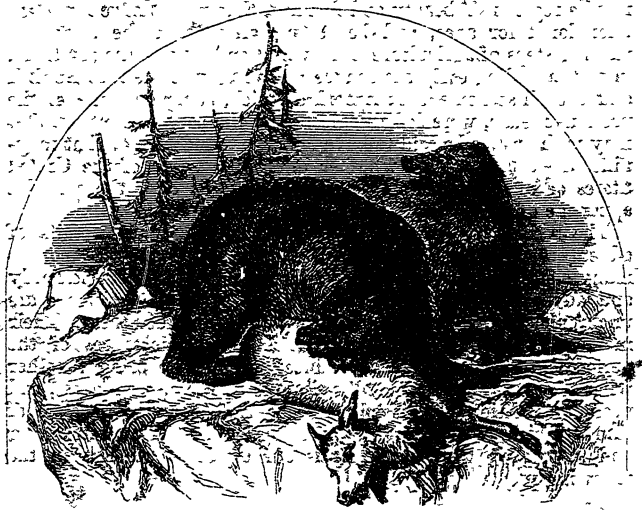
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THE FUR-TRADE AND THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

**F**ROM the earliest period of the history of America, two leading objects of commercial gain, giving birth in their pursuit to wide and daring enterprise, have exerted a marked and abiding influence on the progress of discovery and civilisation in that vast continent: these are the precious metals of the south, and the rich peltries of the north. While the fiery and magnificent Spaniard, inflamed with the mania of gold, was extending his discoveries and conquests over the brilliant countries of the south, scorched by the ardent sun of the tropics,

the adroit and buoyant Frenchman, and the sturdy and energetic Briton were pursuing the less splendid, but hardly less lucrative traffic in furs, and amidst the gigantic forests and perennial snows of the north, laying the foundation, if of a less brilliant and attractive, yet of a more extensive and enduring empire.

These two pursuits have been, in fact, everywhere the pioneers and precursors of civilisation in the New World. 'Without pausing on the borders,' says Washington Irving in his interesting narrative of *Astoria*, 'they have penetrated at once, in defiance of difficulties and dangers, to the heart of savage countries; laying open the hidden secrets of the wilderness, leading the way to remote regions of beauty and fertility, that might have remained unexplored for ages, and beckoning after them the slow and pausing steps of agriculture and civilisation.' It was the fur-trade, in fact, affording early sustenance and vitality to the first English and French settlements in America, which, being destitute of the precious metals, were long neglected by the parent countries, that may with justice be said to have laid the foundation of that magnificent empire, which, whether under the name of the United States or of British America, forms, at this day, the splendid appanage of the Anglo-Saxon race in the New World.

The records of an enterprise marked by so many traits of adventure, privation, and dauntless energy, would doubtless possess many elements of romantic interest; but the exploits of the hardy and adventurous individuals to whom it owes its existence are unchronicled. No Robertson or Prescott has recorded them. Their memory has long passed away with the circumstances of the period and situation which produced them. To bring together what scattered notices are still accessible of the rise, progress, and present condition of this adventurous traffic, and of a state of things which is now fast disappearing, will form an interesting and instructive task, which it is our object to attempt in the following pages.

At the period of the first colonisation of America by Europeans, all that territory which extends eastward from the Mississippi to the Atlantic, and northward from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson's Bay, appears to have been one vast and unbroken forest. This immense area, embracing the greater part of the present United States, and British America east of the great lakes, was then, as a considerable portion of it is still, little more than an extensive haunt of wild beasts. In the security of such undisturbed retreats, these creatures had multiplied incalculably, the few native tribes who roamed over this wilderness, without flocks or tame animals, having left unlimited scope and provision for the animal race, wandering and free like themselves. With few wants, and these easily supplied, it was not until our luxury had led us to adopt the use of furs as costly appendages to dress, that the natives commenced that war of extermination against the animal tribes

which has ever since continued. The destructive industry with which this, when once begun, was followed up, soon brought into the ports of France and England vast quantities of furs, some of which were consumed there, and the rest disposed of in the neighbouring countries. Most of these furs were already known in Europe: they came from the northern parts of our own hemisphere, but in too small quantities to bring them into general use. Caprice and novelty, however, brought them more or less into fashion, since it was found that it was for the interest of the American colonies that they should be admired in the mother-countries.

#### THE FUR-TRADE IN CANADA UNDER THE FRENCH.

Whether from the favourable situation of their settlements along the banks of the St Lawrence, in the very heart of the fur countries, or from the congeniality of the pursuit itself to the character and habits of that volatile and restless race, it is certain that the French soon acquired, and for a considerable period retained, a superiority in the fur-trade over other European nations in America. From time to time, our own intrepid navigators, employed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the ineffectual search for the north-west passage, had brought home specimens of the valuable furs which the northern portion of the American continent contained. But the first regular and permanent traffic with the Indians, appears to have been opened up about the beginning of the seventeenth century, by the French colony, at Tadousac, a post situated on the St Lawrence about thirty leagues below the present town of Quebec. The large profits arising from this commerce, and the advantages to be derived from its more extended and systematic prosecution, did not escape the vigilant and sagacious eye of Cardinal Richelieu, then at the head of affairs in France. To give effect to the views he entertained on this subject, he originated, about the year 1628, under his own immediate auspices, an extensive association under the name of *La Compagnie de la Nouvelle France (New France)*, being the name by which the somewhat indefinite possessions of the French in America were at that time distinguished. To this association, which consisted of 700 copartners, including in their number some of the most distinguished men of the time in France, various important privileges were granted. The king made a present of two large ships to the company, and twelve of the principal members were raised to the rank of nobility. They had the disposal of the settlements that were, or should be formed in New France, with the power of fortifying and governing them as they thought proper; and of making war or peace as should best promote their interests. The whole trade by land and sea, 'from the river St Lawrence to the Arctic Circle and the Frozen Ocean,' was made over to them for a term of fifteen years, except the cod and whale

fisheries, which were left open to all French subjects. The beaver and all the fur-trade was granted to the company for ever. In return for such extensive concessions, the company, which had a capital of 100,000 crowns, engaged to bring into the colony during the first year of their incorporation, 200 or 300 artificers, of such trades as were fitted for their purpose; and 16,000 men before the year 1643. They were to find them in lodging and board, and to maintain them for three years; and afterwards to give them as much cleared land as might be necessary for their subsistence; together with a sufficient quantity of grain to sow it for the first year. A leading object of the company's incorporation was represented to be the propagation of Christianity among the native Indians; and with this view the most liberal provision was made for a numerous staff of missionaries, who accompanied the first settlers to the new colony.

Fortune, however, did not second the endeavours of government in favour of the new association. The first ships fitted out by them were taken by the English, who were lately embroiled with the French on account of the siege of Rochelle. Other disasters speedily followed; the monopolising company fulfilled none of their engagements; and the colonists, becoming clamorous in their complaints against the arbitrary measures and abuses of their administration, one after another of the privileges granted to the company had to be modified or recalled. It was found impossible to enforce the restrictions imposed upon the trade with the Indians, and these soon came, therefore, to be practically regarded by the colonists as a dead letter. Finally, the association itself, unable to accomplish any of the objects for which it had been established, was formally dissolved.

Freed from the incubus of the company's monopoly, the adventurers settled on the banks of the St Lawrence gave full scope to their roving propensities and their love of adventure. Allured by the enormous profits to be derived from the traffic with the Indians, and the unbridled licence of a savage life, these daring and hardy individuals penetrated for hundreds of miles into the wilderness, then, as now, known in Canada as the Indian Country. As the valuable furs soon grew scarce in the neighbourhood of the settlements, the Indians of the vicinity were stimulated to make a wider range in their hunting excursions. They were generally accompanied in these expeditions by some of the traders or their dependents, appropriately named *coureurs des bois*, or rangers of the woods, who shared in the toils and privations of the chase, and at the same time made themselves acquainted with the best hunting and trapping grounds, and with the remote tribes, whom they encouraged to bring their peltries to the settlements.

In this way the trade was augmented, and drawn from remote quarters to Montreal, where, in process of time, all the fur-trade of the colony centered. From this point the traders, ever in quest

of new fields of adventure and profit, ascended the St Lawrence and Ottawa rivers to their sources, and formed establishments on the Great Lakes. From the north-western end of Lake Superior, they threaded the intricate communication which leads by lakes, rivers, and portages to Lake Winnipeg, and from thence penetrated some distance up the great stream of the Saskatchewan, 'the Mississippi of the north.' Their most distant establishment was on the banks of that river, in latitude 53 degrees north, and longitude 103 degrees west. This place was situated at a distance of upwards of 2000 miles from the colonised part of Canada; the route to it was through a country occupied by numerous savage tribes, where the means of subsistence were scanty, and the navigation unfit for any other craft than frail birch-rind canoes. Yet we have evidence that 'at this distant establishment considerable improvements were effected; that agriculture was carried on, and even wheel-carriages used; in fact, that they then possessed fully as many of the attendants of civilisation as the Hudson's Bay Company do now, after the lapse of a century.\*' The author of *Astoria* presents us with a lively picture of those palmy days of the French fur-trade in Canada:—'Every now and then, a large body of Ottawas, Hurons, and other tribes who hunted the countries bordering on the great lakes, would come down in a squadron of light canoes, laden with beaver-skins and other spoils of their year's hunting. The canoes would be unladen, taken on shore, and their contents disposed in order. A camp of birch-bark would be pitched outside of the town, and a kind of primitive fair opened, with that grave ceremonial so dear to the Indians. An audience would be demanded of the governor-general, who would hold the conference with becoming state, seated in an elbow-chair, with the Indians ranged in semicircles before him, seated on the ground, and silently smoking their pipes. Speeches would be made, presents exchanged, and the audience would break up in universal good-humour.

'Now would ensue a brisk traffic with the merchants, and all Montreal would be alive with naked Indians running from shop to shop, bargaining for arms, kettles, knives, axes, blankets, bright-coloured cloths, and other articles of use or fancy; upon all which, says an old French writer, the merchants were sure to clear at least 200 per cent. There was no money used in this traffic, and after a time, all payment in spirituous liquors was prohibited, in consequence of the frantic and frightful excesses and bloody brawls which they were apt to occasion.

'Their wants and caprices being supplied, they would take leave of the governor, strike their tents, launch their canoes, and ply their way up the Ottawa to the lakes. . . . The French merchant at his trading-post, in these primitive days of Canada, was a kind of commercial patriarch. With the lax habits and easy

\* *Life and Travels of Thomas Simpson, the Arctic Discoverer.*

familiarity of his race, he had a little world of self-indulgence and misrule around him. He had his clerks, canoe-men, and retainers of all kinds, who lived with him on terms of perfect sociability, always calling him by his Christian name. He had his harem of Indian beauties, and his troop of half-breed children; nor was there ever wanting a louting train of Indians hanging about the establishment, eating and drinking at his expense in the intervals of their hunting expeditions.'

It is not necessary to investigate the cause, but experience has shewn, that it requires much less time for a civilised people to degenerate into the manners and customs of savage life, than for savages to rise into a state of civilisation. Such was the event with the *coureurs des bois*, who, after accompanying the natives on their hunting and trading excursions, became so attached to the Indian mode of life, that they lost all relish for their former habits and native homes. For this very reason, however, these peddlers of the wilderness were extremely useful to the merchants engaged in the fur-trade, who freely supplied them with the necessary credit to proceed in their trading excursions. Three or four of these people would join stock, embark their property in a birch-bark canoe, which they worked themselves, and making their way up the mazy rivers that interlace the vast forests of Canada, commit themselves fearlessly to the first tribe of Indians they encountered. Sometimes they sojourned for months among them, assimilating to their tastes and habits with the happy facility of Frenchmen, adopting, in some degree, the Indian dress, and not unfrequently taking to themselves Indian wives. These voyages would extend often to twelve or fifteen months, when they would return in full glee down the Ottawa, their canoes loaded with rich cargoes of furs, and followed by great numbers of the natives. Now would ensue a period of revelry and dissipation, a continued round of drinking, gaming, feasting, and extravagant prodigality, which sufficed in a few weeks to dissipate all their gains, when they would start upon a fresh adventure, to be followed by fresh scenes of riot and extravagance.

The influence of such conduct and example could not but be pernicious to the native Indians, impeding the labours of the missionaries among them, and bringing into scandal and disrepute the character of the Christian religion among those natives who had become converts to it. As a check upon these loose adventurers, the missionaries prevailed upon the government to prohibit, under severe penalties, all persons from trading into the interior of the country without a licence. These licences were at first granted only to persons whose character could give no alarm to the zeal of the missionaries, but they came in time to be bestowed as rewards for services to officers and their widows, and others, who having the power of selling them again to the merchants, who again, in their turn, employed the *coureurs des bois* as their agents, the abuses of the old system were very soon revived and continued as



flagrant as before. At length, military posts were established at the confluence of the principal lakes and rivers of Canada, which in a great measure restrained the excesses of these marauders of the wilderness, and at the same time protected the trade. The persons in charge of these posts frequently engaged in the traffic themselves, under their own licences, having in most cases the exclusive privilege of buying and selling in the districts under their command, and combining their views with those of the missionaries, restored some degree of order and regularity to the trade, at the same time that they secured the respect of the natives. To distinguish themselves from the traders, they assumed the name of 'Commanders,' though they were, in fact, entitled to both these characters. As for the missionaries, they appear to have laboured most zealously and assiduously in the great work they had undertaken, receiving from the first the most cordial aid and encouragement both from the government and the colonists. Indeed, it is but justice to the French to state, that during their tenure of the fur-trade, the interest they displayed in the welfare of the aborigines furnishes a humiliating contrast to the conduct of our own government, or rather of the great trading association by whom their functions have been exercised since the traffic has passed into our hands. 'The whole of their long route,' says Sir Alexander Mackenzie, speaking of these missionaries, and of the neglect into which the missions had fallen in his time (toward the end of the last century), when the fur-trade had passed into the hands of the British — 'the whole of their long route I have often travelled; and the recollection of such a people as the missionaries having been there, was confined to a few superannuated Canadians, who had not left that country since the cession to the English in 1763, and who particularly mentioned the death of some, and the distressing situation of them all. Though these religious men did not attain the objects of their persevering piety, they were, during their mission, of great service to the French commanders who engaged in those distant expeditions, and spread the fur-trade as far west as the banks of the Saskatchewan River.'

RISE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

The fur-trade of Canada had for a long time to sustain a keen competition from the British and Dutch settlers of New York, who inveigled the coureurs des bois and the Indians to their trading-posts, and traded with them on more favourable terms. In the absence of any regular organisation, however, among these settlers, the isolated and desultory efforts of individual traders served rather to keep alive the spirit of activity and enterprise among the French, than in any very permanent or considerable degree to affect the extensive and important traffic which had now grown up under their hands. But in the year 1669, another and a

more formidable opposition sprang up in a new and unexpected quarter.

A few years before this date, M. de Groisieliez, an inhabitant of Canada, a bold and enterprising man, and one who had travelled extensively among the Indians, had pushed his discoveries so far, that he reached the coasts of Hudson's Bay from the French settlements by land. On his return, he prevailed upon the authorities at Quebec to fit out a vessel for perfecting this discovery by sea, which led in the same year to the establishment of the first European settlement on the shores of Hudson's Bay, at the mouth of Nelson River—near the site of the present York Factory—to which the French gave the name of Fort Bourbon. Some subsequent difference with his employers led to Groisieliez's abandoning his establishment, and proceeding to France, where, finding his representations as ill received as they had been in Canada, he was induced to lay his proposals for opening a trade in Hudson's Bay before the Duke of Montague, then our minister in France, who, entering warmly into the project, despatched Groisieliez, with his brother-in-law, M. Radisson, who had accompanied him from Canada, at once to England, with a recommendation to Prince Rupert, then the great patron of all enterprises of this nature. From Prince Rupert our adventurers received every encouragement. A small vessel, the *Nonsuch*, under the command of Captain Zachariah Gillam, with the Frenchmen on board, was sent into Hudson's Bay under the prince's auspices, in the summer of 1668, and in the same year established, at the mouth of Rupert's River, at the southern extremity of the bay, the first English settlement, to which Captain Gillam gave the name of Fort Charles. This led in the following year to the incorporation of the adventurers into a company, by a charter from King Charles II., dated 2d May 1669; and thus was instituted the Hudson's Bay Company, destined in time to exercise over the wintry lakes and boundless forests of the north, a sway equalled only by that of the East India Company over the voluptuous climes and magnificent realms of the East. This charter—which continues to the present day to confer upon the Company whatever legal right it may possess to the monopoly it has so long exercised over the fur-trade of British North America—appears to have been as nearly as possible an unconscious counterpart of that of Cardinal Richelieu's Association. In the same loose and ignorant phraseology, it grants to the Company immense territories, the situation and extent of which were at the time entirely unknown, but which, strictly interpreted, enables the Company to claim at the present day, in the language of one of its governors before a recent parliamentary committee, 'the country all the way from the boundaries of Lower and Upper Canada, away to the north pole as far as the land goes; and from the Labrador coast all the way to the Pacific Ocean'—that is, a territory considerably greater than the entire area of the continent of Europe! Such grants

were common enough in those days; but this charter of the Hudson's Bay Company is perhaps unique in this respect—that it subsists in full vigour to the present time, in all its literal and venerable absurdity, and forms the sole title by which a few merchants in London have retained for nearly two centuries the entire monopoly of the fur-trade of British North America—a commerce, in proportion to its extent, the most lucrative perhaps in the world.

The privileges granted by the charter of King Charles II., on the right understanding of which some of the most important passages in the Company's history have turned, are of three distinct kinds:—

1st. The privilege of exclusive trade throughout certain territories which the charter professes to describe, and which it calls Rupert's Land.

2d. The property and lordship of the soil of Rupert's Land.

3d. The privilege of exclusive trade with all the countries into which the Company might find access by land or water out of Rupert's Land.

To these privileges there were but two drawbacks: 1st. The charter received no parliamentary sanction or confirmation, without which no grant of exclusive trade can be valid—a defect on which we shall have to touch again presently. 2d. The territories granted to the Company by the charter had been already, as we have seen, granted by the French king to the Company of New France, of which Hudson's Bay and the adjacent countries formed an integral portion; and as the charter itself expressly reserved the 'possession of any other Christian prince or state,' it was not unreasonably argued by the French, that it carried on its face its own abrogation. In reply to this objection, it was stoutly maintained that the country around Hudson's Bay formed no part of the continent of North America at all—a view in which it appears the advocates of the Company were not without respectable authority to support them. 'Surely I need not tell you,' writes Mr Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society, to the celebrated Mr Boyle, 'what is said here with great joy of the discovery of a north-west passage, made by two English and one Frenchman, lately represented by them to his majesty at Oxford, and answered by a royal grant of a vessel to sail into Hudson's Bay, and thence into the South Sea; these men affirming, as I heard, that with a boat they went out of a lake in Canada into a river, *which discharged itself north-west into the South Sea, into which they went, and returned north-east into Hudson's Bay!*'

Meanwhile, pending these discussions, the French, alarmed at the prospect of an opposition in a quarter which threatened to cut off the most valuable part of their trade, resolved on taking active measures for expelling the new-comers as interlopers. Their fears of the result of the English settlement upon their trade had been confirmed by the unanimous testimony of the *coureurs des bois*, who by this time had established a regular intercourse by land

between the Indians on the borders of the Straits and the French settlements on the St Lawrence. It would have been a desirable thing to have gone by the same road to attack the new colony; but the distance being thought too considerable, notwithstanding the convenience of the rivers, it was at length determined that an expedition against the new settlements should be undertaken by sea. The conduct of it was intrusted to Groiselliez and Radisson, who had been easily brought back to a regard for their country.

These two bold and restless men sailed from Quebec in 1682, in two vessels badly fitted out; but, on their arrival, finding themselves not strong enough to attack the enemy, they were contented with erecting a fort in the neighbourhood of that they thought to have taken. From this time there began a rivalry between the two companies—one settled in Canada and the other in England—for the exclusive trade of the Bay, which was constantly fed by the disputes it gave birth to, till at last, after each of their settlements had been frequently taken by the other, hostilities were terminated by the Treaty of Ryswick, signed in September 1697, the eighth section of which provided that commissioners should be appointed to settle the pretensions of the English and French to the trade of Hudson's Bay. By this treaty the claims of the French to the best portion of the Bay were definitely acknowledged, and up to the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714, they appear to have enjoyed undisturbed possession of nearly the whole of the trade of the disputed territories.

There is but little information respecting the proceedings of the English Company in the interval, but there is reason to believe that their situation was by no means a prosperous one. The defect in their charter, arising from the absence of any confirmation by parliament, has been already noticed. It was found impossible, without this confirmation, to exclude interlopers from the territories claimed under the grant of King Charles II. At least we find this the ground of a petition from the Company to parliament in 1690, for an act to confirm their charter. The confirmation was granted, but for 'seven years only, and no longer.' On the expiration of the Act of Confirmation in 1697, another application was made for its renewal, which was this time either negatived or withdrawn by the Company themselves, for they have, from that time to the present, continued to trade upon their unconfirmed charter. It seemed probable, in view of these repeated disasters, that the English Company was destined to share the fate of its French prototype; but the Treaty of Utrecht in 1712 changed once more the fortunes of the snow-clad regions of Hudson's Bay.

Louis XIV., after a series of defeats and mortifications—the ignominious close of a long reign of glory and prosperity—was still happy that he could, in his old age, purchase peace by sacrifices which denoted his humiliation. But he seemed to wish to conceal these sacrifices from his people, by making them chiefly beyond the sea. Among the possessions ceded to the English, after the

long wars rendered memorable in our annals by the victories of Marlborough, and terminated by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1712, were Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Hudson's Bay. A special clause of the treaty provided that all French subjects should evacuate the Bay within six months after its ratification. A clear field was thus opened for the operations of the English Company, which they lost no time in securing. Two courses were now open to them: either to petition for a grant of the ceded territories, or obtain a confirmation and extension of their original charter, so as to include them; or quietly to take possession of the abandoned trading-posts, and establish such a footing in the country and the trade as would prevent or overawe all competition. The latter course they resolved, without doubt wisely, on adopting. Their policy henceforth, accordingly, was, and continues to be to this day, to shroud their transactions in the most impenetrable mystery—to assert on all occasions the rights of their charter, except where there was a prospect of its validity being submitted to a legal test, in which case they have always given way—and, above all, to circulate the impression among the public, that the whole of the immense territory under their sway was a frozen wilderness, where human life could with difficulty be sustained, and which was fit only for the purpose to which they applied it—of a gigantic preserve for wild animals.

In pursuance of this policy, we find the history of the Company for the next forty years almost a perfect blank. It would be difficult to find a book of the period, or a printed document of any kind in our own language, in which even the name occurs. What information we possess of their proceedings is derived indirectly from the accounts of the French, who, cut off from intercourse with the Bay, kept up an active opposition in the interior from the settlements which remained to them on the St Lawrence. From these accounts, it appears that, up to the middle of the eighteenth century, the Company had scarcely made any advance into the interior; and that, up to this time, their trading-stations were confined almost entirely to the coast. Such an absence of energy and enterprise in a company possessing, or supposed to possess, so many enviable privileges, did not fail to provoke injurious comparisons between them and the free settlers of Canada, who, it was alleged, had been allowed, through the supineness of the English monopoly, to engross the most valuable portion of the trade of even our own territories. At last, in 1748, public attention was directed to the subject by a motion in parliament for an inquiry into the state of the trade to Hudson's Bay. The result was the appointment of a committee of the House of Commons, the publication of whose Report, still preserved among the parliamentary papers, appears to have excited a perfect storm of execration among the commercial community of the time. Making every allowance for the peculiarly fervid and truly English hatred manifested by the public of this country at all

times against monopolies, it must be admitted that some of the revelations brought to light by this committee, were such as to give ample ground for the popular indignation they called forth.

As bearing upon the history of the Company, it will be sufficient here to notice one of the numerous charges preferred against them at that time, as it throws some light on the profits derived from the fur-trade at that early period. The charge was that of having made a false return of the amount of capital employed in the trade to Hudson's Bay, which the Company stated as L.103,500, while the only real subscribed capital was L.13,650. It appears that the original capital subscribed was L.10,500; and that, in consequence of the enormous profits realised, the Company trebled their stock in 1690—that is, they passed a vote by which the stock of the Company was declared to be L.31,500; and the object seems to have been, that the dividends might appear to be smaller upon a larger nominal capital, than upon the original subscribed capital of L.10,500.

Continued prosperity, after the Treaty of Utrecht had thrown the trade of Hudson's Bay into their hands, enabled the Company to perform a similar trick in 1720. In this year the capital was declared to be again trebled, and to amount to L.94,500. It was then proposed to add three times as much to it by subscription; but in this way, that each proprietor subscribing L.100 should receive L.300 of stock; so that the nominal stock should amount to L.378,000, the real additional sum subscribed being L.94,500. This plan was frustrated by the difficulty at the time of procuring money, and only L.3150 was subscribed. Nevertheless, the whole capital of the Company was ordered to be reckoned at L.103,500, whilst the only subscribed capital, as previously stated, was L.13,650.

The tactics by which the Company supplemented the defects of their charter, and kept out rival traders, are largely detailed in the Report. They appear to have consisted chiefly in fomenting animosities and divisions among the Indian tribes of the interior, that none might be tempted to engage in the trade in that quarter to their disadvantage. Two cases are mentioned, in which ships had attempted to penetrate into Hudson's Bay for the purpose of trade by sea. These ships the Company seized, and ran on shore, where they were lost, pleading in their defence, on an action for recovery and damages, that they had been lost by stress of weather! We are writing, it must be remembered, of the Hudson's Bay Company of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and of the morality of an age in which the slave-trade was a legitimate and honourable employment for the merchants of England. We gladly turn from such incidents to a brighter page in the history of the fur-trade.

## 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

out of this unprincipled competition, the leading individuals in Canada, concerned in the commerce, entered into a partnership in the winter of 1783, under the name of the North-west Company of Montreal—a name famous in the annals of the fur-trade, and which, from small beginnings, rose in a very few years to be the most powerful, energetic, and successful association which had hitherto engaged in the trade. At first, it was nothing more than a voluntary association of the most respectable merchants interested in the fur-trade, many of whom were engaged at the same time in other extensive concerns altogether foreign to it; but it soon assumed a more regular organisation. The concern was then divided into twenty shares, some of which were held by the persons who managed the business in Canada, and were called agents, and the remainder by proprietors, who wintered in the Indian country, and managed the trade with the natives, and were hence called 'wintering partners.' It was the duty of the agents to import the necessary goods from England, store them up in warehouses in Montreal, and prepare them for being sent into the interior. They were likewise expected to advance any cash that might be wanting for the outfits, for which they received a commission, independent of their share of the profits. Lastly, they received, packed up, and shipped the company's furs for England, to the proper agents to whom they were intrusted for sale, on which they had also a small commission. The wintering partners were not under any obligation to furnish capital; but as it was upon their energy, tact, and experience, that the prosperity of the association mainly depended, they were required to go through a strict probation before they could arrive at that enviable station. They were selected, in the first instance, from respectable families in Canada—generally Scotch emigrants—and entered the company's service under an apprenticeship for seven years, during which they received L.100 sterling, were maintained at the expense of the company, and furnished with suitable clothing and equipments. This probation was generally passed at the interior trading-posts, where they were removed for years from civilised society, leading a life almost as wild and precarious as the savages around them; but acquiring in the meantime a perfect knowledge of the Indian character, and of the resources of the country in which they lived. On the expiration of their apprenticeship, they received a salary of L.100 per annum, and were then eligible, on a vacancy, to promotion to a partnership, according to their merits and services. With ordinary good conduct, there were few young men who entered the service who found their reasonable expectations in this respect disappointed. No system, perhaps, could have been better devised for infusing activity into every department, and so extending the influence of the company, which was soon indeed practically demonstrated by the rapid prosperity to which it speedily attained. 'In 1788,' says Sir Alexander Mackenzie, 'the gross amount of the adventure



for the year did not exceed £40,000; but by the exertion, enterprise, and industry of the proprietors, it was brought in eleven years to triple that amount and upwards—yielding proportionate profits, and surpassing, in short, anything known in America.'

The agents who presided over the affairs of the company at head-quarters, were of course personages of great weight and importance in the concern. Consisting, in at least the later years of the company, chiefly of veteran partners and traders who had gained distinction in the rough campaigns of the north, they were a class *sui generis*, living in lordly and hospitable style, and forming a sort of commercial aristocracy in the society of Quebec and Montreal. It was during the palmy days of the company, while on a short visit to Canada, that Washington Irving had an opportunity of witnessing something of the feudal magnificence which characterised the proceedings of these magnates of the North-west, and of which he has left us, in *Astoria*, a lively sketch. 'To behold the North-west Company in all its state and grandeur,' says he, 'it was necessary to witness an annual gathering at the great interior place of conference, established at Fort-William, near what is called the Grand Portage, on Lake Superior. Here, two or three of the leading partners from Montreal proceeded once a year to meet the partners from the various trading-posts of the wilderness, to discuss the affairs of the company during the preceding year, and to arrange plans for the future.

'On these occasions might be seen the change since the unceremonious times of the old French traders—now the aristocratical character of the Briton shone forth magnificently, or rather the feudal spirit of the Highlander. Every partner who had charge of an interior post, and a score of retainers at his command, felt like the chieftain of a Highland clan, and was almost as important in the eyes of his dependents as of himself. To him a visit to the grand conference at Fort William was a most important event, and he repaired there as to a meeting of parliament. The partners from Montreal, however, were the lords of the ascendant. Coming from the midst of luxurious and ostentatious life, they quite eclipsed their compeers from the woods, whose forms and faces had been battered and hardened by hard living and hard service, and whose garments and equipments were all the worse for wear. Indeed, the partners from below considered the whole dignity of the company as represented in their own persons, and conducted themselves in suitable style. They ascended the rivers in great state, like sovereigns making a progress, or rather like Highland chieftains navigating their subject lakes. They were wrapped in rich furs, their huge canoes freighted with every convenience and luxury, and manned by Canadian voyageurs as obedient as Highland clansmen. They carried up with them cooks and bakers, together with delicacies of every kind, and abundance of choice wines for the banquet which attended this great convocation. Happy were they, too, if they could meet with any distinguished

stranger—above all, some titled member of the British nobility—to accompany them on this stately occasion, and grace their high solemnities. Fort William, the scene of this important annual meeting, was a considerable village on the banks of Lake Superior. Here, in an immense wooden building, was the great council-hall, as also the banqueting-chamber, decorated with Indian arms and accoutrements, and the trophies of the fur-trade. The house swarmed at this time with traders and voyageurs from Montreal bound to the interior posts, and some from the interior posts bound to Montreal. The councils were held in great state; for every member felt as if sitting in parliament, and every retainer and dependent looked up to the assemblage with awe as to the House of Lords. There was a vast deal of solemn deliberation and hard Scottish reasoning, with an occasional swell of pompous declamation. These grave and weighty councils were alternated by huge feasts and revels, like some of the old feasts described in Highland castles. The tables in the great banqueting-room groaned under the weight of game of all kinds—of venison from the woods and fish from the lakes, with hunter's delicacies, such as buffaloes' tongues and beaver's tails, and various luxuries from Montreal, all served up by experienced cooks brought for the purpose. There was no stint of generous wine, for it was a hard-drinking period—a time of loyal toasts and Bacchanalian song and brimming bumpers.

While the chiefs thus revelled in the hall, and made the rafters resound with bursts of loyalty and old Scottish songs, chanted in voices cracked and sharpened by the northern blast, their merriment was echoed and prolonged by a mongrel legion of retainers—Canadian voyageurs, half-breed Indian hunters, and vagabond hangers-on—who feasted sumptuously without, on the crumbs from their table, and made the welkin ring with old French ditties, mingled with Indian yelps and yellings.

'One or two partners,' he adds, 'recently from the interior posts, would occasionally make their appearance in New York in the course of a tour of pleasure or curiosity. On these occasions, there was always a degree of magnificence of the purse about them, and a peculiar propensity to expenditure at the goldsmiths' and jewellers' for rings, chains, brooches, necklaces, jewelled watches, and other rich trinkets, partly for their own wear, partly for presents to their female acquaintances—a gorgeous prodigality, such as was often noticed in former times in West Indian planters and Eastern nabobs flush with the spoils of Oriental conquest.'

Such were the results which, in a few years, marked the prosperity of this energetic association. In an incredibly short period, the whole of the immense region, extending from the confines of Canada to Slave Lake on the north, and the Pacific Ocean on the west, was studded by the remote posts of the company, where they carried on their traffic with the surrounding tribes. Their trade appears to have taken this direction, in the first instance, chiefly with the view of appropriating and extending that of their

French predecessors. They were influenced, no doubt, likewise by a desire to leave the Hudson's Bay Company unmolested in the comparatively narrow sphere to which they had hitherto confined their operations in the country immediately surrounding the Bay. The latter had, however, as previously stated, already commenced moving their posts westward. This soon brought the two companies into collision, and a keen competition now commenced, which, confined at first to their respective outposts, soon spread over the greater part of the country east of the Rocky Mountains. Such a competition, carried on in a country remote from civilisation and the restraints of law, could scarcely fail to be marked by many revolting scenes of rapacity and violence. Personal conflicts with fists between the men, and not unfrequently between the clerks and partners of the rival companies, were of the commonest occurrence, and not unfrequently more deadly weapons were employed. Stratagem was, however, more frequently resorted to than open violence. In ignorance of the value of the furs, which formed the object of such eager contention, the hunts of the Indian were generally at the disposal of the first trader who reached his encampment. On both sides, men were constantly kept on the look-out for parties of natives returning from their hunting expeditions, whose duty it was to waylay them, and ply them with fire-water, and 'all the arts of cozenage,' until every skin had been obtained from them, if possible, before the opposite party could arrive at the scene.

As the rival trading-posts were generally built within 200 or 300 yards of each other, it was by no means easy for either party to steal a march upon the other. Mr Ballantyne relates an anecdote in his *Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay*, which will serve to shew how a feat of this kind could now and then, however, be accomplished:—

'Although the individuals of the two companies,' he says, 'were almost always at enmity at the forts, strange to say they often acted in the most friendly manner to each other, and—except when furs were in question—more agreeable or friendly neighbours seldom came together than the Hudson's Bay and North-west Companies when they planted their forts—which they often did—within 200 yards of each other in the wilds of North America. The clerks and labourers of the opposing establishments constantly visited each other; and during the Christmas and New-year's holidays, parties and balls were given without number. Dances, however, were not confined entirely to the holidays; but whenever one was given at an unusual time, it was generally for the purpose of drawing the attention of the entertained party from some movement of their entertainers. Thus, upon one occasion, the Hudson's Bay Company's look-out reported that he had discovered the tracks of Indians in the snow, and that he thought they had just returned from a hunting expedition. No sooner was this heard, than a grand ball was given to the North-west

Company. Great preparations were made; the men, dressed in their newest capotes and gaudiest hat-cords and feathers, visited each other, and nothing was thought or heard of but the ball. The evening came, and with it the guests; and soon might be heard within the fort sounds of merriment and revelry as they danced in lively measures to a Scottish reel, played by some native fiddler upon a violin of his own construction. Without the gates, however, a very different scene met the eye. Down in a hollow, where the lofty trees and dense underwood threw a shadow on the ground, a knot of men might be seen muffled in their leathern coats and fur-caps, hurrying to and fro with bundles on their backs and snow-shoes under their arms, packing and tying them firmly on trains of dog-sledges which stood, with the dogs ready harnessed, in the shadow of the bushes. The men whispered eagerly and hurriedly to each other, as they packed their goods, while others held the dogs, and patted them to keep them quiet—evidently shewing that, whatever was their object, expedition and secrecy were necessary. Soon all was in readiness; the bells, which usually tinkled on the dogs' necks, were unhooked and packed in the sledges; an active-looking man sprang forward, and set off at a round trot over the snow; and a single crack of the whip sent four sledges, each with a train of four or five dogs, after him; while two other men brought up the rear. For a time the muffled sound of the sledges was heard as they slid over the snow, while now and then the whine of a dog broke upon the ear as the impatient drivers urged them along. Gradually these sounds died away, and nothing was heard but the faint echoes of music and mirth, which floated on the frosty night-wind, giving token that the revellers still kept up the dance, and were ignorant of the departure of the trains. Late on the following day, the Nor'-west scouts reported the party of Indians, and soon a set of sleighs departed from the fort with loud ringing bells. After a long day's march of forty miles, they reached the encampment, where they found all the Indians dead drunk, and not a skin, not even the remnant of a musquash, left to repay them for their trouble! Then it was that they discovered the *ruse* of the ball, and vowed to have their revenge. Opportunity was not long wanting. Soon after this occurrence, one of the parties met a Hudson's Bay train on its way to trade with the Indians, of whom they also were in search. They exchanged compliments with each other, and as the day was very cold, proposed lighting a fire and taking a dram together. Soon five or six goodly trees yielded to their vigorous blows, and fell crashing to the ground; and in a few minutes one of the party, lighting a sulphur match with his flint and steel, set fire to a huge pile of logs, which crackled and burned furiously, sending up clouds of sparks into the wintry sky, and casting a warm tinge upon the snow and the surrounding trees. The canteen was quickly produced, and they told their stories and adventures, while the liquor mounted to

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their brains. The Nor'-westers, however, unperceived by the others, after a little time spilled their grog on the snow, so that they kept tolerably sober, while their rivals became very much elevated; and at last they began boasting of their superior powers of drinking, and as a proof, each of them swallowed a large bumper. The Hudson's Bay party, who were nearly dead drunk by this time, of course followed their example, and almost instantly fell in a heavy sleep on the snow. In ten minutes more, they were tied firmly upon their sledges, and the dogs being turned homewards, away they went straight for the Hudson's Bay fort, where they soon arrived, the men still sound asleep, while the Nor'-westers started for the Indian camp, and this time at least had the furs all to themselves.'

### UNION OF THE NORTH-WEST AND HUDSON'S BAY COMPANIES.

Amid such scenes, relieved not unfrequently by contentions of a sterner kind—bloody brawls and conflicts between parties of armed men, involving often the loss of life and considerable destruction of property—a severe and uninterrupted competition was carried on by the two companies for nearly thirty years. At length, in the year 1821, when the violence of the contest had nearly exhausted the means of both parties, an arrangement was entered into between them, by which their interests became united, under the management of a board of directors chosen from both companies. The new association, which retained the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, possessed sufficient influence with the government of the day to obtain a licence of exclusive trade over the territories situated west of the Rocky Mountains—the country on the east side being considered sufficiently protected by the establishments of the two companies already formed there—and such vague rights as might be claimed under the charter of King Charles II. The licence of exclusive trade was granted for a period of twenty-one years, and on its expiration in 1842, it was renewed until the year 1859.

By the deed-poll of 1821, regulating the organisation of the new association, there were twenty-five chief factors and twenty-eight chief traders appointed—corresponding to the junior and senior wintering partners of the North-west Company—who were named in alternate succession from the servants of both companies. The profits, which have averaged since 1821 about L.200,000 per annum, on a nominal capital of L.400,000—a tenth part only being probably paid up—were divided into 100 shares, of which 60 were divided among the proprietors in England and Canada. The remaining 40 were subdivided into 85 shares, and each of the twenty-five chief factors was entitled to 2 shares, or 2-85ths; and each of the twenty-eight chief traders to 1-85th—the remaining

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seven of the 85 shares being appropriated to retiring partners, in certain proportions, for seven years. With a few unimportant modifications, the arrangement entered into in 1821 subsists to the present day, when all traces of rival interests may be said to have long since disappeared, and become merged in one united and powerful organisation.

The territory embraced within the present operations of the Company may be roughly estimated at somewhat more than 4,000,000 of square miles, or about one-third greater than the whole extent of Europe. This vast area, which is covered by a net-work of about 100 trading-posts, scattered at distances of about 300 or 400 miles apart, is divided into four large departments: 1st, The Montreal Department, which includes all the establishments situated between the river St Lawrence and the great lakes of Canada, and along the north shore of the Gulf of St Lawrence and the coast of Labrador; 2d, The Southern Department, which includes the country along the north shores of Lake Superior and the southern shores of Hudson's Bay; 3d, The Northern Department, which comprehends all the establishments north of this, as far as the shores of the Polar Sea; and 4th, The Columbia Department, including the territory watered by the Columbia and other rivers west of the Rocky Mountains. The departments are divided into a number of 'districts,' each under the direction of a superior officer; and these, again, are subdivided into numerous factories, forts, posts, and outposts.

The Company is governed by a governor and committee, resident in London, elected by the stockholders, who meet once a year for the transaction of general business, and to discuss and receive reports, &c. The committee appoint a resident superintendent, who assumes the style of 'governor,' to preside at councils of chief factors and chief traders, by whom the business in America is conducted, and the instructions of the home committee carried into effect. The lower ranks of the Company's service consist of seven grades, whose duties are thus defined by Mr Ballantyne—'First, the labourer, who is ready to turn his hand to anything: to become a trapper, fisherman, or rough carpenter, at the shortest notice. He is generally employed in cutting firewood for the consumption of the establishment at which he is stationed, shovelling snow from before the doors, mending all sorts of damages to all sorts of things; and, during the summer months, in transporting furs and goods between his post and the nearest depôt. Next in rank is the interpreter: he is, for the most part, an intelligent labourer, of pretty long standing in the service, who, having picked up a smattering of Indian, is consequently very useful in trading with the natives. After the interpreter comes the postmaster, usually a promoted labourer, who, for good behaviour or valuable services, has been put on a footing with the gentlemen of the service, in the same manner that a private soldier in the army is sometimes raised to the rank of a

commissioned-officer. At whatever station a postmaster may happen to be placed, he is generally the most useful and active man there. He is often placed in charge of one of the many small stations or outposts throughout the country. Next are the apprentice-clerks—raw lads who come out fresh from school, with their mouths agape at the wonders they behold in Hudson's Bay. They generally, for the purpose of appearing manly, acquire all the bad habits of the country as quickly as possible, and are stuffed full of what they call fun, with a strong spice of mischief. They become more sensible and sedate before they get through the first five years of their apprenticeship, after which they attain the rank of clerks. The clerk, after a number of years' service, becomes a chief trader (or half-shareholder), and in a few years more he attains the highest rank to which any one can rise in the service—that of chief factor.

The number of employés in the Company's service is somewhat more than 1000, who are scattered in dozens and half-dozens throughout the various trading-posts over the country. They consist, for the most part, of Orkneymen, Scotch Highlanders, Norwegians, and a few French Canadians—the only class of persons to whom the hard fare and wretched pay of the Company—averaging a little more than L.1 per month—hold out sufficient temptation to enter the service. The salaries of the clerks vary from L.20 to L.100 per annum. In the time of the North-west Company, when promotion to a partnership was within the reach of almost every well-conducted young man in the service, the clerks were generally persons of good family and education. Under the present system, where, in the absence of competition, the chief stimulus to individual exertion and the opportunity for distinction it afforded has been withdrawn, and where the promotions have become in consequence monopolised among the connections of a few influential families, few persons of this class are found disposed to enter the service, or to remain long in it when they have done so. The trade carried on by the Company is almost entirely in furs, though small quantities of oil, dried and salted fish, feathers, quills, &c., are also sent to England. Viewed in any other light than as a profitable investment for a few shareholders in London, the trade to the vast continent under the sway of the Company is extremely insignificant. It employs, altogether, but three ships annually—two to Hudson's Bay, and one to the north-west coast.

Sales are made, by public auction, of furs and other returns from the country, twice or thrice in each year, at the Company's premises in London, at which one of the directors usually attends, to buy in such lots as do not reach a certain value. Printed lists of the articles to be exposed for sale are open to public inspection at the auction-room some days before. The following lists of the spring and autumn sales, in March and August-1848, may be taken as a fair average of the amount of these sales, and of the

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various kinds of furs usually exposed at them :—In March, there were sold by auction at the Hudson's Bay House, in Fenchurch Street—5780 otter-skins; 458 fisher; 900 silver fox; 18,100 ditto, cross, red, white, and kitt; 2566 bear, black; 536 ditto, brown, gray, and white; 30,100 lynx; 9800 wolf; 680 wolverein; 121,000 marten; 24,000 mink-skins; and sundry smaller lots. And in August—21,349 beaver-skins; 54 pounds of coat-beaver and pieces; 808 otter-skins; 195 sea-otter; 150 fur seal; 744 fisher; 1344 fox; 2997 bear; 29,785 marten; 14,103 mink; 18,553 musquash; 1551 swan; 1015 lynx; 632 cat; 1494 wolf; 228 wolverein; 2090 racoon; and 2884 deer skins, &c. This forms but a small part of the yearly returns from the Company's territories, considerable quantities being exported to the continent, the United States, and occasionally to China.

From the profound secrecy in which all the proceedings of the Company are enveloped, it is difficult to arrive at any accurate details regarding the entire extent of their trade, and the profits derived from it. The gross returns from the sales of furs and other articles in London, are estimated by competent authorities, as has been previously stated, at somewhat more than L.200,000 per annum. The amount of manufactured goods exported from this country for the traffic with the natives is not known, and there are, therefore, no reliable data for estimating the profits accruing to the shareholders after all expenses have been deducted. Unlike every other description of stock, also, Hudson's Bay shares are never found in the market—the directors having, as is understood, the right of pre-emption. The profits realised upon the trade with the Indians are better known. The recent crown grant of Vancouver's Island to the Hudson's Bay Company—an episode in the colonial policy of Earl Grey, which will probably be familiar to most readers from the strong opposition it called forth at the time from parliament and the press—brought to light, among other results, some interesting details of the internal administration of the Hudson's Bay territories, upon which the public had previously little or no information. In an account of the fur-trade, we are no further concerned with these details—which the curious in such matters will find fully set forth in the Parliamentary Reports on the subject—than as they throw light upon the relations of the Company with the native Indians, the great army of hunters and trappers scattered over the wilds of North America, to whom this extensive and important commerce, in reality, owes its existence.

It is difficult to form an estimate, approaching to accuracy, of the population of the Hudson's Bay territories. From forty to fifty different tribes, speaking distinct languages, have been enumerated; but the discordant estimates even of the oldest and most experienced residents in the Indian country, forbid all idea of arriving at any accurate estimate of their numbers. Compared with the extent of territory, there can be no doubt that the



numerical amount of the population is extremely small, being scattered, as savage communities usually are, over immense tracts of wilderness, which they roam over like the wild animals on which they subsist, rather than occupy, in any received sense of the term among ourselves. These tribes are very unequally distributed, and differ considerably in manners, customs, and modes of life, as might be expected from the varying character of the climate, and the physical aspect of the country they inhabit, and the various wants and habitudes to which this difference gives rise. A general view of the Hudson's Bay territories presents for notice four great natural regions, whose inhabitants, though differing in language, and often entertaining for each other a bitter and implacable hatred, present sufficient points of similarity in their habits and modes of life to be grouped together. These are:—

1. The Columbia or Oregon Territory—a country of varied features, extending from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and bounded severally on the north and south by the possessions of Russia and the United States.

2. The Wooded Region, occupying the country from Canada northwards along the southern shores of Hudson's Bay, and extending along the Valley of the Mackenzie and Peace Rivers nearly to the Arctic Ocean.

3. The Prairie Region, situated between the forementioned divisions, and occupying the Valley of the Saskatchewan and Red Rivers, and the upper waters of the Missouri and Mississippi.

4. The strip of sterile country along the northern shores of Hudson's Bay and the coast of the Polar Sea, familiarly known as the Barren Grounds.

Of these divisions, the Wooded Region is the most extensive and the most valuable for the purposes of the fur-trade—all the finer skins which find their way to the London market being obtained from it. It has, in consequence, been long occupied and thoroughly worked by the trading-posts and agencies of the Company. The Indians inhabiting it are, in general, at the present day, a mild inoffensive race. Long familiarity with the whites, and the habits of trade, have produced a friendly feeling among them towards Europeans, and a desire for the commodities with which they supply them, and this renders them by far the most valuable and industrious class of the population of the Hudson's Bay territories. The relation of the Company towards them is an extremely simple one—the Indians hunt and trap for the furs, which the Company receive, giving in exchange such articles as are suited to the simple wants and tastes of the natives. Trade is carried on by means of a standard valuation, based on the market-price of a beaver-skin, and hence denominated a *made-beaver*. This is to obviate the necessity of circulating money, which is quite unknown in any part of the Indian country. A beaver-skin is considered, in the Indian trade, equivalent to two, three, or more skins of inferior value. Thus an Indian arriving at

one of the Company's establishments with a bundle of furs which he intends to trade, proceeds in the first instance to the trading-room. There the trader separates the furs into lots, and after adding up the amount, delivers to the Indian a number of little pieces of wood, indicating the number of made-beaver to which his hunt amounts. He is next taken to the store-room, where he finds himself surrounded by bales of blankets, slop-coats, guns, knives, powder-horns, flints, axes, &c. Each article has a recognised value in made-beaver. A slop-coat, for example, is twelve made-beavers, for which the Indian delivers up twelve of his pieces of wood; for a gun he gives twenty; for a knife, two; and so on, until his stock of wooden cash is expended.

It will hardly be necessary to say, that the remuneration afforded to the poor Indian for his furs is, through the complete monopoly enjoyed by the Company, out of all proportion to the market value of the skins in England. This will be shewn from the table of tariff in next page, regulating the value in the Indian trade of some of the more valuable furs, and affording a comparison between the buying and selling prices of the articles in which the Company deals, to which perhaps the records of no other association in the world afford a parallel. It has been extracted from the parliamentary papers above referred to, and is introduced with the statement, that 33½ per cent. on the prime cost of the goods is considered by the Company to cover the expenses of freight, carriage, &c., to the country. The selling-prices of the different skins in London are extracted from a table given by the late Mr Hugh Murray, in his work on British North America, in the *Edinburgh Cabinet Library*, based on a list stated to have been furnished by the Company, as a fair indication of the average prices of furs in the market.

It would probably be unjust to infer from the following tariff, that the system of trade carried on by the Company, as there indicated, is equally unfavourable to the unfortunate Indian in other parts of their territories. It is certain that, at the establishments along the United States' frontier and the outskirts of Canada, it is often necessary, in order to crush or prevent competition, to give even more than the full value of the skins. Other expenses necessarily incurred in the prosecution of the trade—such as the wages of officers and servants, and the freight of shipping—must also be taken into account, as adding to the ridiculously small outlay of the Company. Still, enough remains of what is wrung from the hard hands of Indians' to pay dividends in London upon Hudson's Bay Stock, after all the efforts which have been made, as previously described, to give it a fictitious value, to render it one of the best investments in England. It is difficult to say how far the griping system by which these excessive gains are produced has been productive of the general misery among the natives subject to it, which the recent inquiries into the condition of the Hudson's Bay territories have brought to light. The *wants* of Indians, in a region where buffalo or deer are to be

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INDIAN TARIFF OF THE TERRITORY EMBRACED WITHIN THE ROYAL LICENCE,  
SITUATED EAST OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

Prime Cost.	Articles supplied to the Indians.	Beaver-Skins.		Marten-Skins.		Silver Fox-Skins.		Lynx-Skins.		Otter-Skins.	
		No.	Market Value. £ s. d.	No.	Market Value. £ s. d.	No.	Market Value. £ s. d.	No.	Market Value. £ s. d.	No.	Market Value. £ s. d.
22 0 0	1 Gun,	20	32 12 0	60	46 10 0	5	50 0 0	20	20 0 0	20	23 10 0
0 1 1/2	1 Gill of Powder,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 1 1/2	18 Leaden Bullets,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 0 1	8 Charges of Shot,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 0 1	10 Gun Flintes,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
1 6	1 Axe,	3	4 17 6	9	6 19 6	1	7 10 0	3	3 0 0	3	3 10 6
12 0 0	1 Copper Kettle (6 gallons),	16	26 0 0	48	37 4 0	16	40 0 0	16	16 0 0	16	18 16 0
0 2	1 Fire-steel,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 0	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 4	1 Scalping-knife,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 0	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 6	1 File (8-inch),	2	3 5 0	6	4 13 0	1	5 0 0	2	2 0 0	2	2 7 0
0 9	1 Tobacco-box and Burning-glass,	2	3 5 0	6	4 13 0	1	5 0 0	2	2 0 0	2	2 7 0
0 2	1 Common Horn Comb,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 2 1/2	8 Awls,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 3 1/2	1 Dozen Brass Buttons,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 0 3	12 Brass Finger-rings,	2	3 5 0	6	4 13 0	1	5 0 0	2	2 0 0	2	2 7 0
0 0 1	6 Clay Tobacco-pipes,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 0 4	1 Paper-mounted Mirror,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 10	1 Pound of Heads,	6	9 15 0	18	13 19 0	6	15 0 0	6	6 0 0	6	7 1 0
0 3 1/2	6 Ounce of Tobacco,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
5 9 1/2	1 Blanket (3-point) plain,	10	16 5 0	30	23 5 0	10	25 0 0	10	10 0 0	10	11 15 0
7 0	" " striped,	12	19 10 0	36	27 18 0	12	30 0 0	12	12 0 0	12	14 2 0
12 0	Man's Slop-coat (large),	12	19 10 0	36	27 18 0	12	30 0 0	12	12 0 0	12	14 2 0
5 3	Boy's " (largest),	5	8 2 6	15	11 12 6	5	12 10 0	5	5 0 0	5	5 17 6
0 2 1/2	6 Yards Gartering,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
6 6	1 Pair of Trousers,	0	14 12 6	27	20 18 6	9	22 10 0	9	9 0 0	9	10 11 6
1 9	1 Shirt (Cotton),	3	4 17 6	9	6 19 6	3	7 10 0	3	3 0 0	3	3 10 6
0 0 4 1/2	1 Handkerchief (Cotton),	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 3	1 Ounce of Vermilion,	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6
0 4	1 Pint of Rum (watered),	1	1 12 6	3	2 6 6	1	2 10 0	1	1 0 0	1	1 3 6

1 Silver Fox-Skin is equivalent to 4 Beaver-Skins.

found, as is the case in the prairie region and parts of the Oregon territory, are limited to ammunition and a few articles of iron and tin; and their *desires*, to the possession of a few trinkets. There are extensive tracts, however, in which the means of subsistence are scanty in the extreme; and in the greater part of the territories now under review—namely, the wooded districts, where, under a constant persecution for more than a century, the larger animals which supply the food of man have nearly become extinct (the preservation of the fur-bearing animals is provided for by strict regulations laid down by the Company) the wretched natives, during winter, can with difficulty collect enough food to support life. In this part of the country, fish is at all times scarce and difficult to be obtained in the winter season; and during that period, nearly the sole dependence of the natives for subsistence is placed upon rabbits. When these fail, the most frightful tragedies at times take place. The too frequent resort in such cases is to cannibalism. 'Parents have been known to lengthen out a miserable existence by killing and devouring their own children.' The climate and soil of these tracts are in many parts adapted for cultivation; but from the short-sighted and selfish policy of the traders, no attempts have been anywhere made to develop the agricultural capabilities of the country. Their dread is, that, by abandoning their wandering habits, and setting themselves down to agricultural pursuits, even for a small portion of the year, the Indians might become less valuable as hunters. The fatal results of this policy are every year becoming apparent in the depopulation of the country, from which the native tribes are rapidly disappearing. Giving every credit to the Company for the energy and enterprise of their operations, it cannot be denied that the results of the system under which the Hudson's Bay territories are at present placed, are, as regards the development of the resources of the country, and the progress and enlightenment of the native races, disastrous in the extreme. No doubt, many of the Company's servants are generous and humane, as well as enterprising and intelligent; but, on the other hand, it is equally undeniable that the profits—the very existence of the Company, as at present constituted—depend on keeping the whole territory under their rule a vast hunting-ground, an enormous preserve—upon keeping whole nations of Indians as hunters and trappers, and discouraging anything like civilisation and agricultural settlement; above all, upon keeping the territory shut up, preventing its ever becoming a highway, sticking up a great 'No thoroughfare board' at every entrance, and thus avoiding the risk of any competition in the fur-traffic. Amidst the vast and various sources of our national wealth, and the manifold directions in which it is employed, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the comparatively insignificant commercial operations of the Company should have escaped much public notice. Nor is it more surprising that, invested with such powers, and in the possession

## FUR-TRADE AND THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

of such admirable machinery for veiling in impenetrable secrecy their transactions, as well as the country in which they are carried on, they should have been able for so long a period to prolong their existence. The address, now pending, of the House of Commons to the Crown, for an inquiry into the legality of the powers exercised by the Company under their charter, will probably do much towards placing the administration of the Hudson's Bay territories on a better footing; and it is to be hoped that, among the subjects that will come under the consideration of parliament, the amelioration of the condition of the aborigines will not be overlooked. Apart from all considerations of humanity, it is seldom that the aborigines of any country have had so strong a claim upon our sympathy and protection. The trade created and sustained by their industry has already enriched this country by more than L.20,000,000 sterling; and yet, to this day, throughout the vast territories of Hudson's Bay, there is neither a church nor a school established by the Company where the Indian can receive the commonest rudiments of Christianity or education: he is still roaming about his forests and his lakes, shivering naked that we may be warmly clad, dying by starvation that the cup of our luxury may be filled!

Happily, there are still extensive tracts which the evils of over-hunting and overtrading have not yet reached, and where the Indian may still be found enjoying much of that savage independence, and displaying many of those traits of mind and character, with which fiction and romance have invested him. While the wretched and half-starved hunter of the north drags on a toilsome and cheerless existence, amidst his mazy wilderness of forests and wintry lakes, hanging in helpless dependence upon the white strangers who are making a market of his ignorance and necessities—the powerful and warlike Blackfeet, the Sioux, the Assiniboine, and other formidable tribes, are scouring the boundless prairies of the south and west, and revelling in the abundant produce of countless herds of buffalo and deer. Whatever of romantic interest attaches at the present day to the fur-trade of America, must be sought for here, or in the somewhat similar region on the west of the Rocky Mountains, which we have denominated the Columbia or Oregon Territory.

The Prairie Region, and the districts just alluded to on the west side of the mountains, have been for many years, or at least until the recent settlement of the long agitated 'Oregon Question,' between this country and the United States, a sort of debatable land or border territory between the British and American fur-traders; and this, added to the warlike and predatory character of many of the tribes inhabiting it, has caused a new species of traffic, and a new order of trappers and traders to spring out of the hunting and trapping competition carried on within it. The fur-trade of the United States is, for the most part, in the hands of two great trading associations—the Rocky Mountain Fur Company,

and the American Fur Company; the latter, founded by the celebrated Mr Astor, the originator of the ill-fated enterprise to which Washington Irving has given an enduring celebrity in his popular publication of *Astoria*. The American Fur Companies keep few or no established posts beyond the mountains; everything there is regulated by resident partners—that is to say, partners who reside in the tramontane country, but who move about from place to place, either with Indian tribes, whose traffic they wish to monopolise, or with bodies of their own men, whom they employ in trading and trapping. In the meantime, they detach bands or brigades, as they are termed, of trappers, in various directions, assigning to each a portion of country as a hunting or trapping ground. In the months of June or July, when there is an interval between the hunting-seasons, a general rendezvous is held at some designated place in the mountains, when the affairs of the past year are settled by the resident partners, and the plans for the following year arranged. To this rendezvous repair the various brigades of trappers from their widely separated hunting-grounds, bringing in the products of their year's campaign. Hither also repair the Indian tribes accustomed to traffic their peltries with the Company. Bands of free-trappers—the prototypes of Cooper's popular character of Hawkeye—resort thither also, to sell the furs they have collected, or to engage their services for the next hunting-season.

The employment of these free-trappers, in which the Hudson's Bay Company, along the frontiers, follow the example of their American rivals, has imparted a new character to the trade of this part of the country, and frequently converted the native tribes, some of them incorrigibly savage and warlike in their nature, from peaceful hunters into formidable foes. Some of these tribes, resenting the incursions of the trappers into their hunting-grounds, have long carried on a ruthless crusade against the white invaders of their soil, regarding the expeditions of the fur-traders only as grand objects of plunder and profitable adventure. To waylay and harass a band of trappers with their packhorses, when embarrassed in the rugged defiles of the mountains, has become as favourite and legitimate an exploit with these Indians, as the plunder of a caravan to the Arab of the desert. The Crows and Blackfeet are particularly the terror of the American fur-traders. They know the routes and resorts of the trappers—where to waylay them on their journeys, where to find them in the hunting-seasons, and where to hover about them in winter-quarters. The life of a trapper is thus a perpetual state-militant, and he must sleep with his weapons in his hand.

Many and marvellous are the stories related by American travellers of the hair-breadth 'scapes, and perils by flood and field of the trappers' life in the Far West. Of this kind is a story related by Farnham, in his Travels in the Rocky Mountains, of a trapper who had separated from his companion, and, travelling

far up the Missouri, by chance discovered a most beautiful valley. Here he thought he could remain till his death. 'The lower mountains were covered with tall pines, and above and around, except in the east, where the morning sun sent his rays, the bright glittering ridges rose high against the sky, decked in the garniture of perpetual frosts. Along the valley lay a clear pure lake, in the centre of which played a number of fountains, that threw their waters many feet above its surface, and sending their waves rippling away to the pebbly shores, made the mountains and groves that were reflected from its bosom, seem to leap and clap their hands for joy at the sacred quiet that reigned amongst them. He pitched his tent on the shore, in a little copse of hemlock, and set his traps. Having done this, he explored carefully the valley for egress, ingress, signs, &c. His object was to ascertain if the valley were tenanted by human beings, and if there were places of escape should it be entered by hostile persons through the pass that led himself to it. He found no other except one for the waters of the lake, through a deep chasm in the mountains, and this was such, that no one could descend it alive to the lower valleys; for, as he waded and swam by turns down its waters, he soon found himself drawn by an increasing current, which sufficiently indicated to him the cause of the deep roar that resounded from the caverns below. He, accordingly, made the shore, and climbed along among the projecting crags, till he overlooked an abyss of fallen rocks, into which the stream poured and foamed and was lost in the mist. He returned to his camp, satisfied he had found a hitherto undiscovered valley, stored with beaver and trout, and grass for his horses; where he could trap fish, and dream awhile in safety. And every morning, for three delightful weeks, did he draw the beaver from the deep pools, where they had plunged when the quick trap had seized them; and stringing them two and two together over his packhorse bore them to his camp, and with his long side-knife stripped off the skins for fur, pinned them to the ground to dry, and in his camp-kettle cooked the much-prized tails for his mid-day repast. "Was it not a fine hunt that?" asked he; "beaver as thick as mosquitoes, trout as plenty as water; but the ungodly Blackfeet!" The sun had thrown a few rays upon the rim of the eastern firmament, whence the Blackfeet war-whoop rang around his tent—a direful "whoopah-hoah," ending with a yell, piercing, sharp, and shrill through the clenched teeth. He had but one means of escape—the lake. Into it he plunged beneath a shower of poisoned arrows—plunged deeply, and swam under while he could endure the absence of air. He rose; he was in the midst of his foes, swimming and shouting round him; down again, and up to breathe, and on he swam with long and powerful sweeps. The pursuit was long; but at last he entered the chasm which he had explored, plunged along the cascade as near as he dared, clung to a shrub that grew from the crevice of the rock, and lay under water for the approach of his pursuers. On they came: they

passed, they shrieked, and plunged for ever into the abyss of mist!

Notwithstanding the life of continued exertion, peril, and excitement which they lead, there is no class of men, according to Captain Bonneville, who are more enamoured of their occupation than the free-trappers of the West. No toil, no danger, no privation, can turn the trapper from his pursuit: his passionate excitement at times resembles a mania. In vain may the most vigilant and cruel savages beset his path; in vain may rocks and precipices and wintry torrents oppose his progress; let but a single track of a beaver meet his eye, and he forgets all dangers and defies all difficulties. At times he may be seen with his traps on his shoulder, buffeting his way across rapid streams, amidst floating blocks of ice; at other times, he is to be found with his traps swung on his back, clambering over the most rugged mountains, scaling or descending the most frightful precipices, searching by routes inaccessible to the horse, and never before trodden by white man, for springs and lakes unknown to his comrades, and where he may meet with his favourite game. Such is the hardy trapper of the American fur-trade, and such is the wild Robin-Hood kind of life, with all its strange and motley populace, now existing in full vigour on the mountains and in the vast prairies stretching along the border territories of the Far West.

The Hudson's Bay Company are not partial to the employment of this class, whose notions of trade and fair profits are but little suited to the latitude of Hudson's Bay, and employ them at all only when the encroachments of the American Fur Companies along the frontiers render it necessary to oppose them with their own weapons. The establishments of the Company on the prairie region, and the frontier parts of the Oregon Territory, are kept up at little or no profit, and frequently at a considerable loss, from the high prices it is necessary to pay for the furs, to prevent or crush competition. The establishments are useful, however, as depôts for collecting provisions—being situated in the heart of the buffalo country—for the use of the famished but profitable districts in the north, whence, as already stated, the principal portion of the furs is derived. The produce of the prairie districts consists chiefly of the coarser kinds of furs—such as the wolf, fox, and lynx, and the buffalo-ropes, which are obtained in immense quantities, and fetch a high price in the markets of Canada and the United States, where they are much prized for wrappers for winter-travelling and sledge-driving.

The district referred to in the geographical sketch as the Barren Grounds, is almost valueless for the purposes of the fur-trade. The only inhabitants are the Esquimaux, who live chiefly by fishing along the coast, and trade in oil, feathers, seal-skins, and ivory at the few posts which have hitherto been established in that part of the country.

It has been remarked, that the policy of the Hudson's Bay



Company is averse to colonisation. One small settlement, however, has contrived to force itself into existence on the banks of the Red River—a small stream rising near the head-waters of the Mississippi, and falling into Lake Winnipeg, in latitude 50 degrees north. Red River was first settled upon by the traders of the North-west Company, but it did not assume the character of a colony till 1811, when the late Earl Selkirk, then a leading proprietor in the Hudson's Bay Company, obtained a grant of the territory, ostensibly for the purpose of forming a British settlement on it, but in reality with the view of dispossessing the North-west Company of a valuable district, from which a large portion of their supplies for carrying on their trade in the interior was obtained. On the junction of the two companies, such of their retiring servants with their families as were unwilling to leave the country, were allowed to settle in it. The colony was increased by the accession of a few emigrants brought out from Europe by Lord Selkirk, consisting chiefly of Scotch Highlanders and a few Norwegians; and it now numbers a population of about 10,000 souls. The representatives of Lord Selkirk recently transferred their interests in the colony to the Hudson's Bay Company, by whom it is now governed.

On the north-west coast an experiment is being made, under the auspices of the government, to establish a colony on the Pacific in Vancouver's Island. After a strong opposition in parliament, headed by the present Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Newcastle, the management of the colony was intrusted to the Hudson's Bay Company for a period of five years from 1848. The advantages of its situation, and the large supply of coal found on the island, augur well for its future prosperity and importance. The progress of the settlement must necessarily, however, be very much impeded by the operation of the recent gold discoveries in California, which it is understood have already drawn away many of the emigrants who have proceeded to the island from this country.

A sketch of the fur-trade of North America calls for some notice of the operations of the Russian Fur Company, established in the extreme north-west angle of the continent. This association owes its formation to the Emperor Paul of Russia, who, in the year 1799, organised the trade of the North-west Coast of America on its present footing. The Russian Company, like the Hudson's Bay Company, is a monopoly, but more intimately connected with the government—the emperor being a shareholder, and all its officers being in the imperial service.

The territory embraced within the operations of the Company includes all the Pacific coast of America, and the islands north of latitude  $54^{\circ} 40'$ , and the whole of the continent west of  $141^{\circ}$ ; the Asiatic coast of the Pacific, north of  $51^{\circ}$ ; and the islands of the Kurile group as far south as  $45^{\circ} 50'$ . In 1839, when the charter of the Company was last renewed, there were altogether thirty-six hunting and fishing establishments.

Sitka, or New Archangel, founded in 1805, is a military station, and the chief post of the Russian Fur Company. The fort mounts sixteen short eighteen, and forty-two long nine pounders, and there are about 300 officers and men. The Company has twelve vessels, varying from 100 to 400 tons each, mounting ten guns of different calibre. There is a Greek bishop, with several priests and deacons, and also a Lutheran minister, and several schools for the children of the European and half-caste population. The whole of the territories is divided into six agencies, each controlled by the governor-general, who resides at Sitka. The trade of Sitka in 1842 was estimated at 10,000 fur seals, 1000 sea-otters, 12,000 beavers, 2500 land-otters, foxes, and martens, and 20,000 sea-horse teeth. The progress of Sitka in commerce is very considerable. A recent traveller states, that in April 1843 he found eleven vessels and two steamers in the harbour—one, a steam-tug, had its machinery cast and manufactured at Sitka. Steam pleasure-boats of two horse-power had also been built there.

The census of 1836 gave the number of Russians in the territories of the Company at 730; of native subjects and creoles, 1442; and 11,000 aborigines of the Kurile, Aleutian, and Kodiak islands. The inhabitants of these islands are regarded as the immediate subjects of the Russian Company, in whose service every man between eighteen and fifty may be required to pass at least three years. The natives of the country adjacent to Cook's Inlet and Prince William's Sound, are also under the control of the Company, and are obliged to pay an annual tax in furs and skins.



