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TRANSACTION No. 47.

FEBRUARY 13TH, 1894.

**The Historical and Scientific Society
of Manitoba.**

A FORGOTTEN NORTHERN FORTRESS.

— BY —

HON. JOHN SCHULTZ, M.D., F. Imp. l.

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF MANITOBA,

A LIFE MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

WINNIPEG:

MANITOBA FREE PRESS PRINT.

1894.

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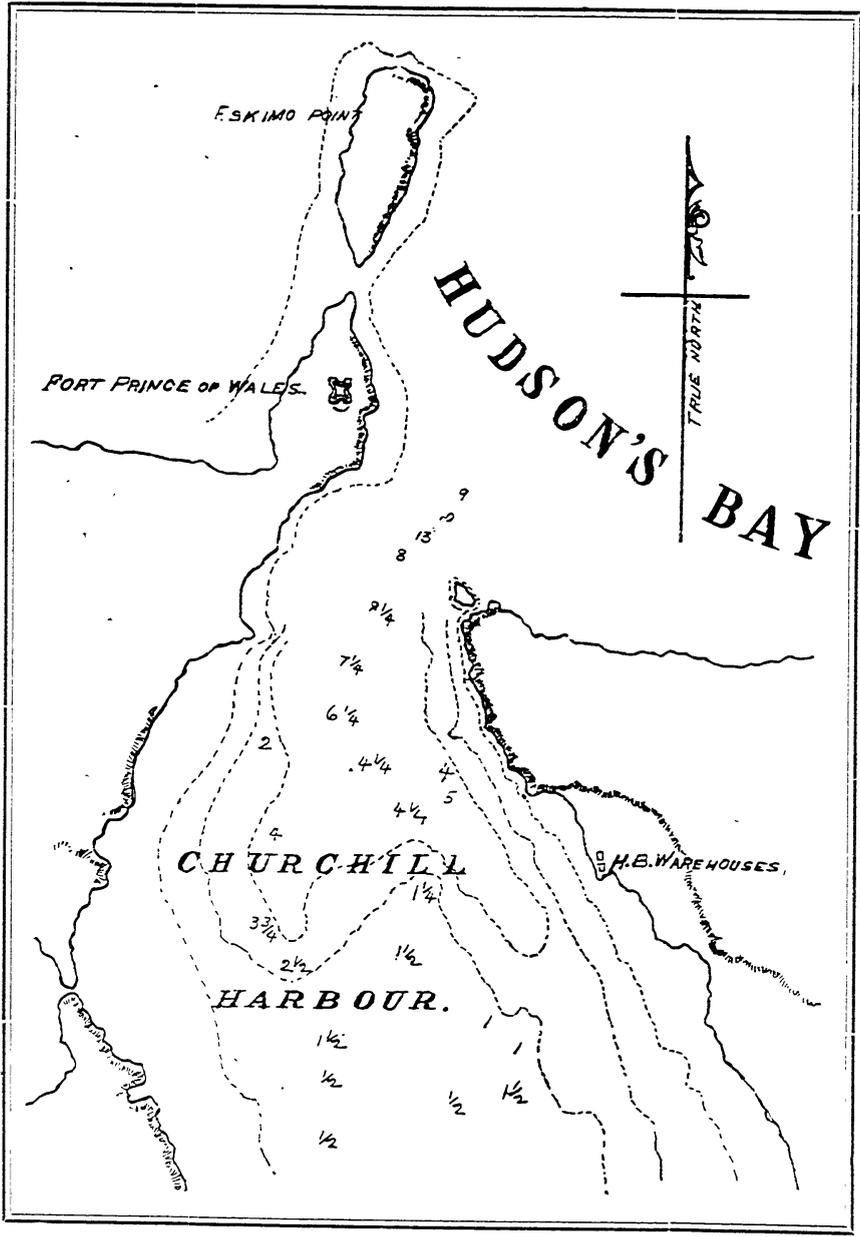
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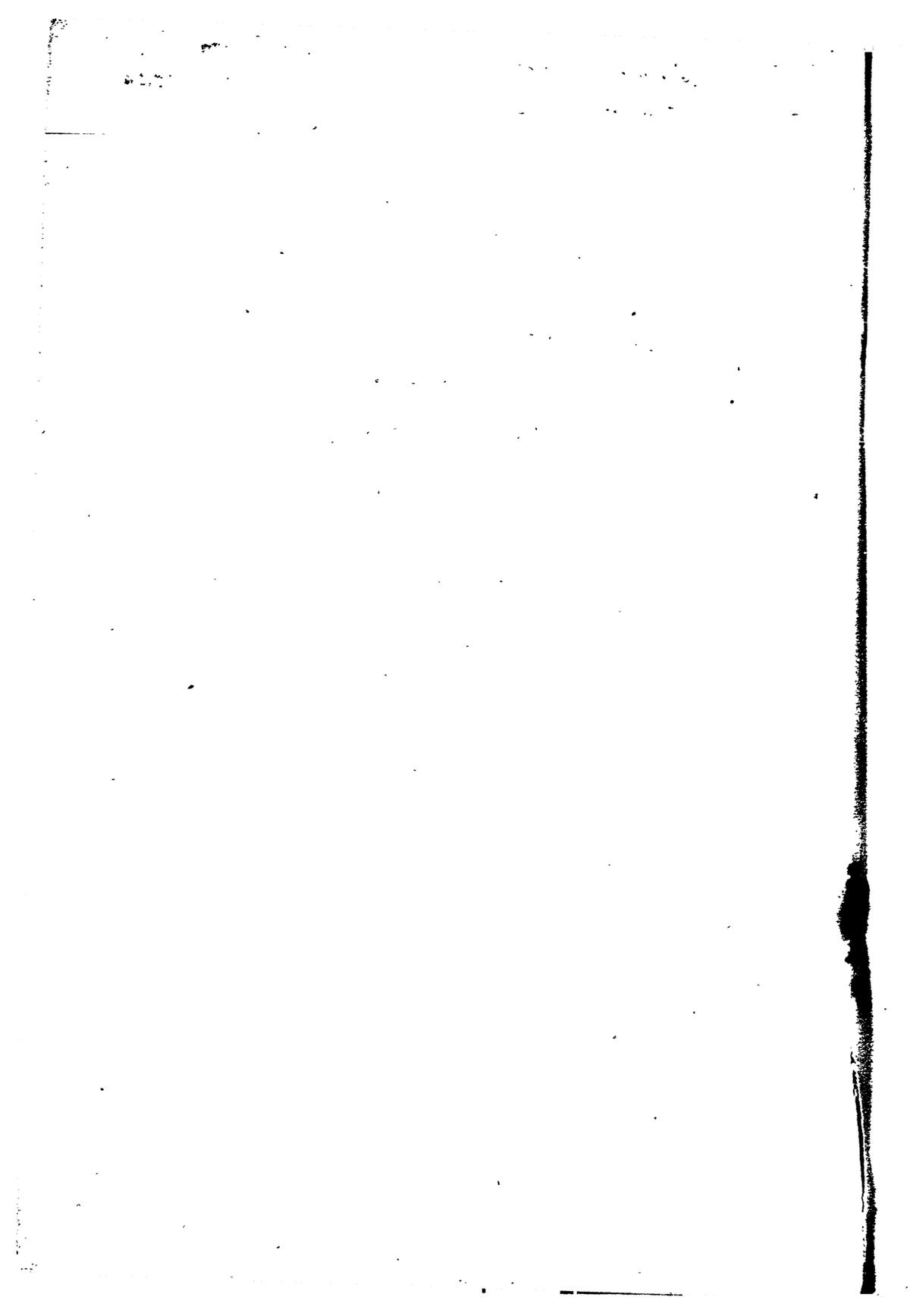
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"A Forgotten Northern Fortress."

His Honor Lieutenant Governor Schultz, previous to reading his paper on "A Forgotten Northern Fortress" before the Historical Society, said that he felt an apology to be due to the President, officers and members of the Society for having been unable to take upon himself a greater share of the Society's work; and that, in the presence of so many gentlemen who had contributed so largely to its successful accomplishment, he felt that he was very far behind indeed. If, however, a reasonable excuse could be found for him in the precarious health and many engagements of the past, he would promise, now that he was better, amendment for the future, and, should the Council be able to give him an evening some time soon, he would prepare for it some matter relating to our early history, which might be of interest to the society. It had been his practice, he said, since 1860 to collect everything in the way of pamphlets, reports, newspaper references and other ephemeral literature which related to the country west of Lake Superior; and when these had become numerous, to have them bound in volumes for preservation. Among such records were many which were purely historical, and he would endeavor, if possible, to select from these, many of them dating back as far as 1857, such as might be an addition to the Society's records.

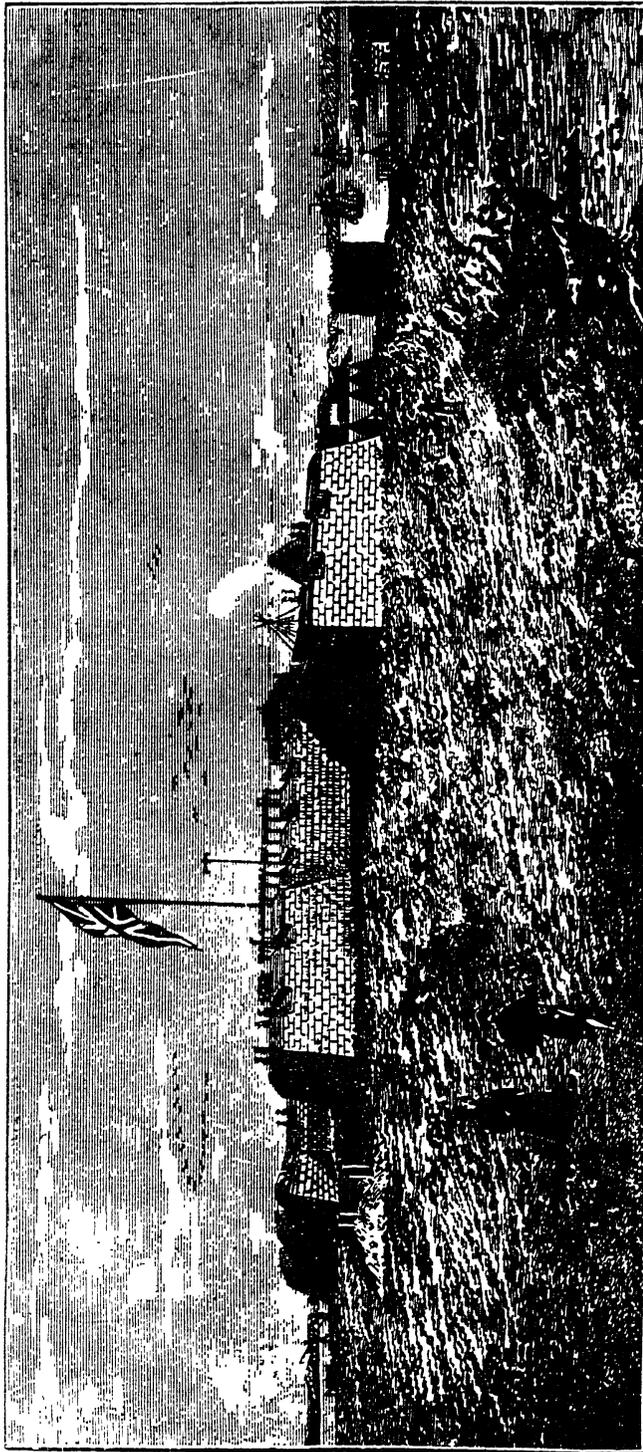
With reference, His Honor said, to the paper he was about to read, a few words of explanation might be advisable. He had chosen for its title "A Forgotten Northern Fortress" as being applicable, inasmuch as being far away from any route of modern tourist or business travel, Fort Prince of Wales is scarcely ever mentioned; and its ruins are seldom seen by other eyes than those on board the Hudson's Bay Company's supply ship, which once a year visits those lonely shores. For the photographic view of its ruins which he had placed upon the table he was indebted to Professor Robert Bell, of

the geological survey, one of the Society's corresponding members. To another of its valued corresponding members, J. R. Spencer, Esq., for many years in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's affairs at Churchill, whose lamentable death occurred in this city a few months ago, he was indebted for the interesting plan of the fortress, drawn by Mr. Spencer himself, which had also been laid on the table. The plan of Churchill harbor, its approaches and soundings, was a rough tracing from the survey made by Lieut. A. R. Gordon, R.N., assisted by Mr. J. W. Tyrrell, P.L.S., in 1886.

Professor Bell, in writing His Honor some time ago, gave the measurements of Fort Prince of Wales as about 300 feet on each side, 20 feet high, 20 feet wide at top, with a wall base of 30 feet, the southern and western walls being faced with hammer dressed stone in regular courses, each stone being about four feet long and two feet thick; the other walls are faced with good rubble masonry. There is a bastion at each corner, and in each of these a well of water, still full, for the supply of the fort. "I counted nearly forty cannon on the top of the walls, but as some of these are nearly covered with rubbish, others are probably out of sight altogether."

The slight discrepancy between his estimate of the height and that of Mr. Spencer may probably be accounted for by one observer including the foundation of the walls in the height; and the little difference in determining the exact width of the top of the wall must be charged to the condition in which La Perouse's gunners (who tried their best to blow up the whole fort), left that more easily destroyed part.

His Honor then, turning to a large map, explained briefly why Churchill, which is now like "Severn," a mere outpost of York Factory, was once the great entrepot of Hudson's Bay trade; and, on the map indicated the several exploratory routes of Hearne, the Arctic search route of Captain, afterwards Sir George, Back, the hunting trip of Warburton Pike, and the later important, difficult, but successful, route, follow-



FORT PRINCE OF WALES.
From the Frontispiece of Hearne's Voyages.

ed by Mr. J. B. Tyrrell, of the Geological Survey; after which the interesting paper of His Honor was read by him as follows:—

A FORGOTTEN NORTHERN FORTRESS.

The sixteenth century closed with that western waterway to the Indies, which all men sought who went "down to the sea" in the quaintly rigged, queerly built ships of the period, undiscovered; and the earlier years of the seventeenth found the ardor of search unabated, and the goal the same. English Kings and Queens, choosing more northern routes than had the monarchs of Spain and France, failed as they had; Henry the Eighth sent the Venetian Cabot, who found Labrador barring the way; Elizabeth sent Frobisher, who, turning its northern flank, found only the ice-blocked strait which bears his name. Davis and Wymouth followed; but it was reserved for the gallant Hudson to discover and sail into a strait, apparently upon the direct route to the west, which opening into a wide sea, that daring mariner must have thought the secret of two centuries unlocked, and fancied that through fog and mist he scented the spice-laden breezes of Cathay. In 1610, mariners were not easily daunted by wreck and ruined hopes; and Hudson's tragic fate in the great sea he had discovered did not deter further search, for, in the years which followed, the frightened Esquimaux, fleeing in his kyack to relate to the old men of his band the strange apparition which glinted white through the mist, and was not the sheen of berg or floe, had but seen the sails of other adventurers who still sought what men had been seeking for three generations in vain.

Button and Bylot, Baffin, James and Fox, Hawkbridge and Jones, all failed to find the desired passage; and when Captain Zachariah Gillam, accompanied by M. de Grosselier, sailed into the bay in 1668, we may suppose that the English merchants who sent him had in view, as well as the Northwest Passage, those rich furs which, brought back by other voyagers, had begun to grace the shoulders of the beauties of

the Louvre and of the English court; for after wintering and trading in a rough stone fort on the bay, he returned to England with reports which gained for his patrons the aid of many gallant but needy cavaliers in obtaining from "Charles the Second, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland," in the year 1670, a charter "of our ample and abundant grace" to "our dear entirely beloved cousin, Prince Rupert," etc., etc., of what was equal in extent to several European kingdoms, with powers which no potentate in Europe would dare to exercise to-day.

While the English monarch was thus disposing of empire to his favored cousin and courtiers, Richelieu was equally active in France, and parchment powers, signed "Henri" or "Charles," were given with that easy and reckless indifference to the rights of others peculiar to the time, leaving the overlapping boundaries of these vague grants to be rectified and adjusted with the powder and steel of the grantees, and the tomahawk and knife of their Indian allies. England assumed ownership by right of maritime discovery; France, by those land and canoe explorations, which have left her language everywhere in the West, in the names of river and lake, cape, promontory and island. The English Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay occupied the mouths of all the rivers with palisaded forts or factories, and fished, hunted and traded from them, visited once a year by ships, which were watched for by that daring rover, D'Iberville, as Drake had watched for the Spanish galleons. The forts were attacked, and often destroyed, by the hardy voyageurs of New France. Surprises and reprisals continued, till Blenheim, Ramilies and Maplaquet had decided quarrels of more moment, and the Treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, left the English in peaceable possession of their forts, "factories and plantations," on Hudson's Bay.

With France thus prostrate, the English were to pursue, for over sixty years, their profitable trade in peace; but the recollection of burning forts and plundered factories was still keen, and the thunder of D'Iberville's guns not soon to be for-

gotten; and as their trade increased, there came with it the desire to fortify their best bay harbor, and preserve their principal entrepot from possible plunder; so upon a rocky spit, forming one side of and commanding the harbor of Churchill, was commenced Fort Prince of Wales. Vigorously at first was the massive thirty feet wide foundation begun; not, however, on the rude plan of former forts, but from the drawings of military engineers, who had served under Marlborough. Artisans were brought from England; the southern and western walls were faced with hammer-dressed stone bastions were placed at each angle with a well of water in each, and after many years of labor and expense, four walls, each over three hundred feet in length, 20 feet high and 20 feet wide at the top, closed in and protected great stone buildings, which contained each one a prince's ransom in rich northern furs. Forty-two guns of the then heaviest calibre furnished the armament of the bastions and walls, and stores of food were provided to enable the defenders to stand a siege. The Chipewyans, from the far off Athabasca and Great Slave lakes, must have gazed with astonishment at its massive walls and portentous artillery; and its fame throughout all northern tribes must have been great indeed, and have environed with a vague respect the adventurous Hearne, who thrice between 1769 and 1772 left its gates, twice to return baffled and defeated, and lastly on that most adventurous of all Arctic land journeys, to return with the secret of the Arctic coast at the mouth of the Coppermine river in his possession. Years passed on, and as the remembrance of pillaged factories faded and the pressure for increased gain in their rich trade became greater, and the barter more inland, so did the number of men kept at this sea-harbor depot become less, so that it was with great surprise on the 8th of August, 1782, that the thirty-nine defenders of the Prince of Wales Fort saw the belying sails of three ships making straight for their fortress; and when, at six in the evening, they swung to their anchors six miles away, their pierced sides showing them to be vessels of war, their astonishment was great indeed. Strangers they



**RUINS OF FORT PRINCE OF WALES,
Churchill Harbour.**
(From a Photograph by Professor Bell.)

evidently were, for soon pinnace, gig and long boat were busy sounding the approach to the harbor. Day-break saw them disembarking, and the morning's clear light showed to the thirty-nine defenders of the fortress an array of four hundred troops, bearing again the flag of France on those far northern shores. The summons to surrender was followed by a parley, and when the parley ended, the gallant La Perouse found himself in bloodless possession of a fortress which, properly garrisoned, might have defied all the ships of France that had ever entered Hudson's Bay.

The French Admiral quickly transported the rich bales of valuable furs to his ships, and replenished their depleted commissariat from the well-filled provision stores of the fort. Then came the license of the soldiery and the looting of the fort, to be followed by an attempt, which occupied two days, to utterly demolish it. But although French gunpower was freely added to the vast English store, yet the walls of the fort, this well built mass of masonry, resisted the best efforts of the French artillerymen to do more than displace the upper rows of the massive granite stones of which it was mainly built, dismount its guns and blow up the gateway and the stone outwork which protected it.

The capture of this far off northern fortress was cheaply and easily performed by the adventurous Frenchman, who extended his conquests around the shores of the bay; but the fortunes of war after a time turned again, and the Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay, who, at their own expense, had built the fort for the defence of their trade, sent in a bill for many thousand sterling pounds to the British Government, for failing to protect their factory at Churchill; and when, again, peace was proclaimed, it was after the French plenipotentiaries had agreed to settle the bill for La Perouse's capture and demolition of Fort Prince of Wales. It was never rebuilt, and stands on that far-off northern coast, the still well preserved remains of a massive fortification, the most northern one of British America, scarcely inferior, as

such, to Louisburg, or early Quebec; its site admirably chosen; its design and armament once perfect; interesting still as a relic of by-gone strife, but useful now only as a beacon for the harbor it had failed to protect."

Rev. Dr. Bryce, at the close of the paper, moved a hearty vote of thanks to His Honor, speaking in flattering terms of the very interesting paper just read, and proposed that it be printed, with copies of the chart of the harbor, plan of the Fort, and the photographs, and placed in the archives of the Society.

Mr. C. N. Bell, in seconding the motion, expressed regret that this valuable paper should not have been reserved for a future meeting when most interesting matters connected with Hearne, and the capture of the fort might have been fully discussed.

The President, Rev. Professor Baird, in tendering the vote of thanks, stated that His Honor had underrated the aid already given by him to the Society, and said that the Society would value highly, and carefully keep the early documents spoken of by the Governor, and that the Council would be pleased to call a meeting whenever it suited His Honor's convenience.

NOTES REGARDING THE ABOVE.

The statement regarding the failure of La Perouse to entirely destroy the fortress is from Professor Bell, of the Geological Survey, who learned it at Churchill from an aged Indian, whose father was present at the capture of the fort. The first view of Fort Prince of Wales is from Hearne's book, the other views being from photographs taken by Professor Bell. The map of the harbor is from the survey of Lieut.

Gordon and Mr. J. W. Tyrrell, P. L. S., and the following notes have been kindly furnished me by Mr. C. N. Bell, who has consulted the best authorities on the subject.

Fort Prince of Wales stands at the west side of the entrance to the harbor at the mouth of the Churchill River, Hudson's Bay. Its ruins may yet be seen occupying a most commanding position on a rocky promontory commanding Churchill harbor. The fort was built of stone, and at one time mounted forty cannon of various sizes, some of them being quite large for the date. Several years were consumed in the erection of the fort, which was begun in the year 1733. Joseph Robson, who was the surveyor in charge of construction for some years, published a book on the operations of the Hudson's Bay Company, in 1752, in which he gives many details regarding the size and form of the fort. A cut published in Robson's book shows the form of the structure to be a square of three hundred feet, with a massive bastion at each corner. Robson states that the original intention was to have the walls forty-two feet thick at the foundation, but through the interference of the Trading Governor of the post, they were reduced to twenty-five feet, though as the cannon on being fired from the walls rolled off, one side was pulled down and rebuilt according to the original plan. Three of the bastions had arches for storehouses, forty feet three inches by ten feet, and in the fourth was built a stone magazine twenty-four feet long and ten feet wide in the clear with a passage to it through the gorge of the bastion twenty-four feet long and four feet wide. The parapet was originally constructed of wood supplied by demolishing the old fort situated five miles up the Churchill River, the site of which was first occupied in 1688, but in 1746 Robson began erecting the stone parapet. Robson's plan shows that two houses, a dwelling and office building, were erected inside the fort, and incidently he describes one of the two as being 101 feet 6 inches by 33 feet with side walls of 17 feet height, and the roof covered with lead.

Fort Prince of Wales was captured by the French Admiral on the 9th August, 1782, and in his own book



**INSIDE VIEW OF RUINS OF FORT PRINCE OF WALES,
Churchill Harbour.**
(From a Photograph by Professor Bell.)

"La Perouse's Voyages," published in Paris 1788, he writes that he had with him the "Sceptre, carrying 74 guns; the Astarte and the Engageante, carrying each 36 guns; 4 field guns, 2 mortars and 300 bombshells." They sighted the fort on the evening of the 8th August, and anchored in eighteen fathoms of water. An officer sent to reconnoitre the approaches to the fort reported that the vessels could be brought to bear on it at a very short distance. La Perouse, thinking that the Sceptre would not easily subdue the enemy if they resisted, prepared to make a descent during the night, and without difficulty the boats landed about two miles from the fort. La Perouse seeing no preparations made for defence, although the fort seemed to be in a good state, summoned the enemy, the gates were opened, and the Governor and garrison surrendered at discretion. Thus it will be seen from an account written by the French, that the Company's people surrendered without firing a shot. The Governor at that time in charge of the fort was Samuel Hearne, and it is exceedingly strange that he, who had amply proved his personal bravery during his Arctic journeys when he discovered the Coppermine River in 1772, should on this occasion show such a cowardly front to an enemy. Umfreville, who was taken prisoner at the capture of the fort, wrote a full account of the affair to the English papers in April, 1783, and it agrees with the account given by La Perouse. Umfreville was disgusted with the cowardice shown by Hearne, and says that the French were weak and reduced in health after a long sea voyage, most of them poorly clad and only half of them had shoes. Hearne was taken as a prisoner of war by the Admiral to France.

J. S.

