

been a remedy. The experience of a century had shown that the indiscriminate admission of civilized men as traders into the territory of the Indians, is destructive to the morals of the former, and not only to the morals but to the existence of the latter. It has been tried by the French, it has been tried by the English, and it has been tried by the Americans; and in every case the natives have been swept away by war, disease, and famine; and the whites have exhibited a frightful mixture of all the vices of civilized and savage life. 'I have heard it related,' says Mr. Wyeth, himself an American, 'among white American trappers as a good joke, that a trapper who had said that he would shoot any Indian whom he could catch stealing his traps, was seen one morning to kill one; and on being asked if the Indian had stolen his traps, he answered—"No; but he looked as if he was going to." An Indian was thus wantonly murdered, and white men laughed at the joke.'

The union of the two great companies, though it would have cured the mischief of their competition, would have stimulated the enterprise, and let loose the evil passions of hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of private adventurers. To prevent this, and also to subject to the influence of law the British traders who might be allowed to visit the Indian territory, the 1 and 2 Geo. IV. cap. 66, was passed.

That Act, after reciting that the animosities and feuds arising from the competition of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies had for many years past kept the interior of North America in a state of continued disturbance, enacts—that it shall be lawful for His Majesty to give licence to any company or persons for the exclusive privilege of trading with the Indians in any part of North America, not being part of the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, or of any of His Majesty's provinces, or of any lands or territories belonging to the United States. The Act then gives civil jurisdiction to the Courts of Upper Canada over every part of America, not within the existing British Colonies, and not subject to any civil government of the United States. It enables His Majesty to appoint within these limits justices of the peace, and to give them civil and penal jurisdiction, not extending in civil suits beyond £200, or in penal cases, to death or transportation. Cases beyond these limits are reserved for the Courts of Upper Canada.

In pursuance of this Act, charters had been granted to the Hudson's Bay Company, 'for the exclusive trading with the Indians in all such parts of North America to the northward or to the westward of the territories of the United States, as shall not form part of any of the British Provinces, or of the territories of any European power.' The charter requires the Company to provide for the execution of civil and criminal processes over their servants, and to frame and submit to the Crown rules for conducting the trade, which may diminish or prevent the sale of spirituous liquors to the Indians, and promote their moral and religious improvement. And it declares, that nothing contained in it shall prevent his Majesty from establishing any colony within the territories in question, or from annexing them to any existing colony.

It will be observed that the charter contains no clause authorizing the Company to form settlements. Not only have they no power to grant lands, but they have no power even to hold them. The charter gives them as against all other British subjects, but only as against them, the exclusive right of trading with the natives, according to regulations to be approved by the Crown; and it requires them to deliver up their own servants to the jurisdiction of British tribunals. This is the whole amount of the privileges which it grants, and of the duties which it imposes. They cannot acquire for themselves the property, or for the Crown the sovereignty, over a single acre.

This, however, does not apply to the vast region comprised in their original charter of 1670. In that region they are lords of the soil, and it is there therefore, on the banks of the Red River, that they have formed their principal establishment. In that remote colony there are now more than 5000 persons—a Roman Catholic Bishop, a Cathedral, and seven or eight other religious ministers. The Company sell their land at 12s. 6d. an acre, and the plantations extend for fifty miles along the river.† From thence their posts are dotted about from the Atlantic to the Pacific. They are in general stockades, with little wooden bastions at the corners, capable of holding a travelling party of thirty or forty persons, but seldom tenanted by more than four or five permanent inhabitants. The largest is Vancouver on the Columbia, about ninety miles from its mouth, and accessible by vessels of not more than fourteen feet draught. It consists of a stockade enclosing four acres, a village of sixty houses, stores, mills, workshops, a farm of 3000 acres, and a considerable quantity of cattle for the supply of the Company's posts. Another is Fort Nasqually on the sea coast, within the Straits of Fuca. The purposes for which this post has been established require some explanation. The supply of the Russian settlements with provisions, and the Sandwich Islands with timber, has turned out a profitable trade; and it is supposed that the ships which carry supplies to Vancouver might, on their return, fill their stowage, which is more than is required for furs, with wool, hides, and tallow, for the English market. But as such a use of the Company's capital, not being within its charter, would be illegal, a sub-company has been formed, called the Puget's Sound Company, consisting of members of the Hudson's Bay Company; and governed by its officers, but employing capital of their

own.* Their principal farm is at Fort Nasqually, and they have a considerable one on Vancouver's Island, and others between the Straits of Fuca and the Columbia.

To the south of the Columbia, principally on the banks of the Willamet, some agricultural establishments have been formed by Americans. The nucleus is generally a missionary, who proposes to convert the Indians by civilization, and for this purpose begins by using them as agricultural labourers. He is followed by men either misled by the misrepresentations of the climate and soil of Oregon, which, for party purposes, have been spread through the United States; or so unprovided with capital, as to think it worth while to undergo the dangers and toils of the journey, in order to obtain land for nothing. The principal is Oregon, which is thus described in the most recent information which has reached us:— 'This place, Oregon city, is situated at the head of the navigation at the foot of Willamet Falls, one of the greatest water powers in the world. It contains twelve dwelling houses, three stores, one blacksmith's shop, two saw mills, and a grist mill.† The American establishments are not supposed to have yet succeeded as sources of net profit, though they have afforded to the inhabitants the means of existence. Captain Wilkes states, that in 1842 and 1843 prices were merely nominal, and the settlers' horses were fed with their finest wheats.‡

It is, we repeat, as a hunting ground that Oregon is valuable, and, as applicable to this purpose, the merits of the northern and southern portions are reversed. The districts to the north of the Straits of Fuca, which are generally unfit for agriculture and pasturage, still continue to afford a considerable supply of furred animals. Those to the south, which contain some spots fit for settlement, have been almost exhausted as hunting grounds.

In a letter from Mr. Pelly, the Governor, to Lord Glenelg, previous to the grant of the charter of 1838, he states, that nearly their whole profits are drawn from their own proper territory: their other trade showing in some years a trifling loss, and in others a small gain.|| Mr. Wyeth, who had been himself a fur-trader, believes that trade to be less profitable than any other in which as much danger of life and property is incurred; and he adds, that he has good evidence that in 1833 the profits of the western department of the Company, which includes Oregon, did not exceed 10,000 dollars, or less than £2,500.§ This confirms Mr. Pelly.

The fur-trade, as we have already said, is naturally a decreasing trade. If it was bad in 1837, it is not likely to be better now. And this is supported by the testimony of Captain Wilkes, who visited Oregon in 1840. 'Many persons,' says Captain Wilkes, writing from Fort Vancouver, 'imagine that large gain must result from the Indian trade; but this is seldom the case—the Indians understand well the worth of each article. The Company are obliged to make advances to all their trappers, and from such a reckless set there is little certainty of getting returns even if the trapper have it in his power. All the profits of the Company depend on economical arrangements; for the quantity of peltry in this section of the country, and indeed the fur-trade on this side of the mountains, has fallen off fifty per cent. in the last few years. It is indeed reported that this business is at present hardly worth pursuing.'**

This is confirmed by a statement, which we have now before us, of the Company's whole importations for 1844, and of their importations from the Columbia (which includes the whole Oregon territory) in 1845. In 1844, they imported from the whole of their North American territories and hunting grounds 433,398 skins, of the value of £173,936 17s.; of which Oregon furnished only 61,365 skins, valued at only £43,571. In 1845, their importation from Oregon has been only 57,628 skins, valued at £56,749 14s. We have also before us a return of the number of persons in their employ in North America for the year ending the 1st of June 1844. It is 1212. There are many single manufacturing establishments in England—such as the Great Western Cotton Factory in Bristol, or Mr. Marshall's in Leeds—which keep in activity a much larger capital, employ a much greater number of persons, and give a much larger annual produce, than can be predicated of a Company which is the actual proprietor of territories larger than the British Islands, and has the exclusive use of a region greater than the whole of Europe!

But though the Company, as far at least as this portion of their trade is concerned, have been unsuccessful merchants, they have been wise and benevolent administrators. 'In all the countries,' says Mr. Wyeth, 'where the Hudson's Bay Company have exclusive control, they are at peace with the Indians, and the Indians are at peace among themselves.'††

'An opinion has gone abroad,' says Captain Wilkes, 'that at this post (Vancouver) there is a disregard of morality and religion. As far as my observations went, I feel myself obliged to state that every thing seems to prove the contrary. I have reason to believe, from the discipline and the example of the superiors, that the whole establishment is a pattern of good order and correct deportment. This remark not only extends to this establishment but as far as our opportunities went (and all but two of their posts were visited,) the same good order prevails throughout the

* Wilkes, Vol. iv. p. 307.

† See Mr. Perry's letter, dated Oregon city, March 30, 1843, in Simmonds Colonial Magazine, Vol. i. p. 101. ‡ Vol. iv. p. 308.

|| Hudson's Bay Company Correspondence. House of Commons' Paper. 1842, No. 547, p. 26-27 § Territory of Oregon Report, p. 13.

** Vol. iv. p. 333.

†† Territory of Oregon, Report, p. 14.

Mr. Wyeth's Memoir. Report on Territory of Oregon. 25th Congress 3d Session, Report 101.

† Simpson's Travels, cap. vii.