

FUR TRADE OF THE PACIFIC COAST.

(CONCLUDED—IV).

THE monopoly charter of the Hudson's Bay Company granted in 1821, when the two rival English companies were consolidated, would have expired in 1842, but in 1838 the company obtained a new grant for twenty-one years. This gave it an absolute monopoly of trade in all English territory lying between Hudson's Bay and the Pacific, which then included, under the treaty of joint occupation with the United States, the whole of that vast region known as "Oregon," embracing the present Oregon, Washington, Idaho and a portion of Montana. The long contest over this territory was terminated by treaty between the United States and Great Britain in 1846, the forty-ninth parallel being agreed upon as the international line. As this left Vancouver, the great headquarters of the company, in that portion belonging to the United States, it became necessary to make a complete change of base of operations. Anticipating such a contingency, the company had established a post on Vancouver Island, in 1843, which was named "Victoria," in honor of the young queen of England, and to this it was decided to remove as quickly as possible. Of course some time was required for the company to properly wind up its affairs at Vancouver, Fort Boise, Fort Hall, Fort Walla Walla, Fort Colville and other stations on American soil, and it was not until 1857 that a complete withdrawal was made. The treaty provided for the protection of these interests and possessory rights, so far as actual use and occupation extended, and for their purchase by the United States. The Hudson's Bay Company withdrew in 1857, and filed a claim for \$3,882,036.37 against the United States, and the Puget Sound Agricultural Company also claimed \$1,168,000.00. These were finally adjusted in 1864, the former receiving \$450,000.00 and the latter \$200,000.00, less than one-seventh of the original amounts claimed.

The charter of the company expired in 1859, and was not renewed, and since that time the Hudson's Bay Company has had no special privileges in the vast region lying to the west of its original granted dominions. When Canada confederated, in 1868, provision was made for incorporating the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company into the Confederation. In 1869 they were transferred to the British Government for \$1,500,000.00, and the following year were incorporated into the Dominion of Canada. Since that time the great corporation, which had for two centuries held autocratic sway over an empire larger than the whole of Europe, has been but a private company, enjoying no advantages over other traders save those given by its great capital, long experience, thorough and systematic organization, and prestige with the native tribes. One-twentieth of the original grant, as well as valuable tracts around the various posts, were confirmed to the company in fee simple, and are now held by it as absolute property. Great quantities of furs are shipped to London annu-

ally from Victoria, Montreal and York Fort, the latter being the time-honored headquarters on Hudson's Bay. Its collection of peltries is sold at auction in London, in January, March and September of each year. London is the greatest fur market in the world, and receives much of the products of Asia and Europe, the majority of those from North America, Chili, Peru, Buenos Ayres and Africa. Thither, too, are taken the fur seals of Cape Horn, South Shetland and Alaska, and the hair seals of New Foundland. Other important marts are Leipsic, in Germany, Nijni-Novgorod, Kasan and Irbit, in European Russia, and Kiachta, in Siberia, on the border of China, where an immense trade is carried on between the Russians and Chinese. China has always been an excellent market for furs, and when the fur trade first began on the American coast a century ago, Canton was the port to which every ship laden with peltries bent her sails.

In 1867 the United States purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7,200,000.00, and by this means the valuable seal fisheries of that region fell into the hands of Americans. In 1870 the Alaska Commercial Company was granted a monopoly of the sealing industry in Alaska, for a term of twenty years. Their operations are confined to the Pribyloff islands (St. George and St. Paul), generally known as the Seal islands. For this privilege the company pays an annual rental of \$55,000.00, and a tax of \$2.65 on each seal taken, the quantity being limited to one hundred thousand annually. This limit is nearly reached every year, making a total revenue to the government of about \$300,000.00. All other persons are prohibited, under severe penalties, from catching the fur seal anywhere within the limits of Alaska. Fur seals are caught in considerable quantities off the coast of Washington Territory and Vancouver Island, about twenty schooners being engaged in this work during the proper season. More or less clandestine fishing in Alaskan waters is carried on, a matter not so extremely difficult, since the government has but one vessel to guard more than a thousand miles of sea coast. The most important animal not thus protected by law is the sea-otter, of which about five thousand are caught annually in Alaska. This represents half a million dollars in the wholesale market, and as usual with fancy furs, many times that when made up for wear. Nearly half this catch is made near the center of the Aleutian islands, within a radius of the vision from the top of one of the hills of the central group. The sealing fleet alluded to as operating off the Straits of Fuca also catches a number of these valuable fur-bearers. The Alaska Commercial Company, by reason of its seal monopoly, is the best equipped for this business, and in consequence nearly monopolizes the sea-otter catch as well. The Northwest Trading Company, a Portland institution, has a number of posts in Alaska, where are collected furs of all kinds, except seal, and where large quantities of fish are packed and fish oil manufactured.

The Hudson's Bay Company, Alaska Commercial Company, and the Northwest Trading Company are the