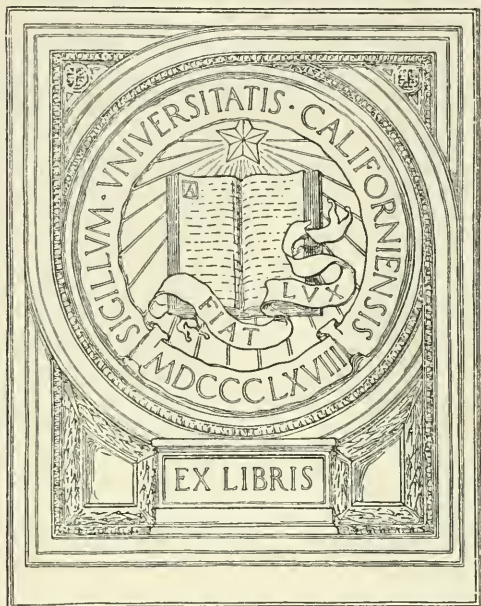


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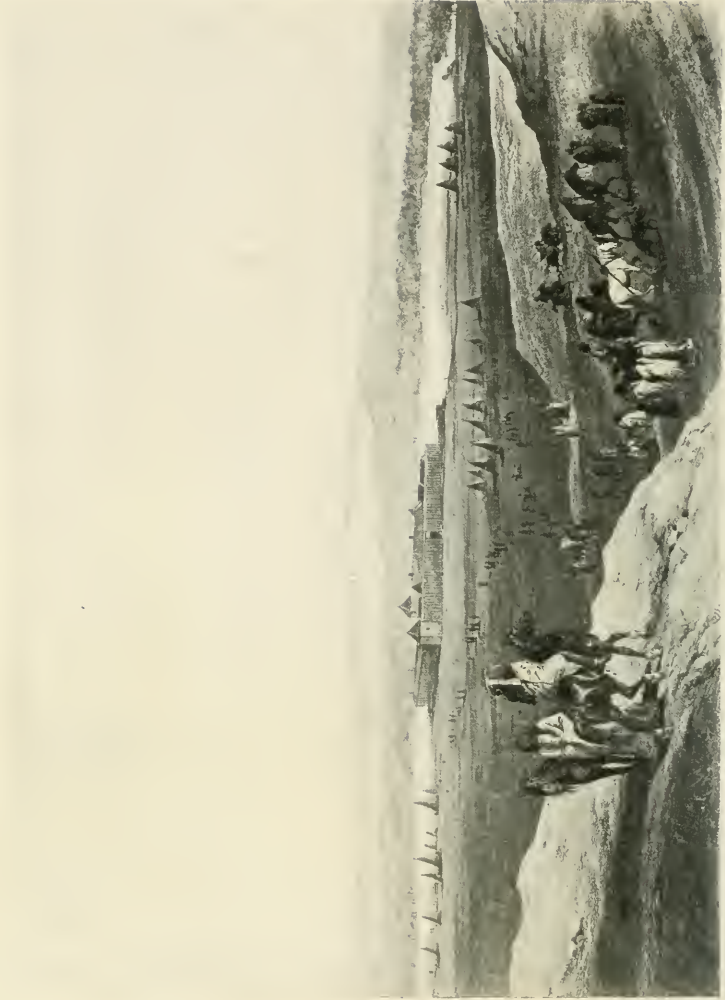
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FORT UNION

(Maximilian - 1833)

THE
American Fur Trade
OF THE
Far West

A History of the Pioneer Trading Posts and **Early**
Fur Companies of the Missouri Valley and
the Rocky Mountains and of
the Overland Commerce
with Santa Fe.

MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

BY
HIRAM MARTIN CHITTENDEN

Captain Corps of Engineers, U. S. A., Author of
"The Yellowstone."

THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME I.

NEW YORK
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IN HONOR OF
THE
Forgotten Heroes
OF
Early Fur Trade Days
WHO
FIRST EXPLORED THE UNKNOWN REGIONS
BEYOND THE MISSISSIPPI
BEARING THE STANDARD OF PEACEFUL COMMERCE
TO THE
REMOTEST VALLEYS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS
AND THE
FAR-OFF COASTS OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN



PREFACE.

A late historical writer has said that there are few more impressive incidents in the history of the West than the meeting by Lewis and Clark, when nearly home from their journey across the continent, of numerous parties of traders wending their way to the heart of the wilderness which these explorers had just left. There could be no doubt in this manifestation of a common purpose which way the course of empire was tending. Scarcely had the United States come into possession of Louisiana, and before she had fairly taken stock of her new acquisition, her citizens had begun to penetrate its remote interior, impatient to learn what it had in store for them.

Thirty-seven years passed away and this movement presented another phase of even deeper significance. A little incident serves to determine its date. In the year 1843 James Bridger, whose name will always be prominent in annals of Western adventure, built a post on a tributary of Green river, a water of the Pacific Ocean, for the convenience of emigrants. It was the first trading post beyond the Mississippi ever built for this purpose, and its establishment marks the beginning of the era of emigration into the Far West.

These two landmarks — the return of Lewis and Clark and the founding of Fort Bridger — determine the limits of a distinct period in Western history. It is a period of which comparatively little is known because it has been obscured by the more brilliant events of that immediately following. The Mormon emigration, the War with Mexico, the dis-

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covery of gold in California, and the controversy over the Oregon Question, absorbed public attention in their time, so far as the West was concerned, and in a large measure have done so since.

For forty years after the purchase of Louisiana the people of the United States were at a loss to know what to do with their new possession. It was not yet needed for settlement, for the eastern shore of the Mississippi was still an unsubdued wilderness in which the stream of emigration might lose itself for many years to come. No one seems to have suspected that its distant mountains abounded in the precious metals. The single attraction that it offered in a commercial way was its wealth of furs, the gathering of which became, and for a long time remained, the only business of importance in this entire region.

The nature of this business determined the character of the early white population. It was the roving trader and the solitary trapper who first sought out these inhospitable wilds, traced the streams to their sources, scaled the mountain passes, and explored a boundless expanse of territory where the foot of the white man had never trodden before. The Far West became a field of romantic adventure, and developed a class of men who loved the wandering career of the native inhabitant rather than the toilsome lot of the industrious colonist. The type of life thus developed, though essentially evanescent, and not representing any profound national movement, was a distinct and necessary phase in the growth of this new country. Abounding in incidents picturesque and heroic, its annals inspire an interest akin to that which belongs to the age of knight-errantry. For the free hunter of the Far West was, in his rough way, a good deal of a knight-errant. Caparisoned in the wild attire of the Indian, and armed *cap-a-pie* for instant combat, he roamed far and wide over deserts and mountains, gathering the scattered wealth of those regions, slaying ferocious beasts and savage men, and leading a life in which every footstep was beset with enemies and every

moment pregnant of peril. The great proportion of these intrepid spirits who laid down their lives in that far country is impressive proof of the jeopardy of their existence. All in all, the period of this adventurous business may justly be considered the romantic era of the history of the West.

But if the fur trade was lacking in events of deep national significance — the Astorian enterprise always excepted — it was not without its influence upon the course of empire in the West. It was the trader and trapper who first explored and established the routes of travel which are now, and always will be, the avenues of commerce in that region. They were the "pathfinders" of the West, and not those later official explorers whom posterity so recognizes. No feature of western geography was ever *discovered* by government explorers after 1840. Everything was already known, and had been for fully a decade. It is true that many features, like the Yellowstone wonderland, with which these restless rovers were familiar, were afterward forgotten and were re-discovered in later years; but there has never been a time until very recently when the geography of the West was so thoroughly understood as it was by the trader and trapper from 1830 to 1840.

This minute knowledge was of practical use in many ways. When Brigham Young selected the valley of Great Salt Lake as the future home of his people, he did so largely upon information derived from the traders. When the War with Mexico came, the military forces of the United States invaded New Mexico under the guidance of men who knew every trail and mountain pass better than the most thorough reconnaissance could have taught them. When the national troops appeared before the gates of Santa Fe they were met by a people who had already been virtually won to the American cause through long intercourse with the traders. When the rush of emigration to California and Oregon followed, the emigrants found a highway across the continent already established. When the government entered in earnest upon the work of exploration, it was the

veteran mountaineer who was always sought to do service as guide.

Profound and far-reaching was the influence of the fur trade upon the destiny of the Indian. If the traders brought with them corrupting vices and desolating disease, they also brought to the Indian his first lessons in the life that he was yet to lead. They mingled with his people, learned his language and customs, understood his character, and, when not impelled by business rivalry, treated him as a man and as a brother. The extensive intermarriage of the two races during a period of more than a century under the fur trade régime has probably done more than any other one thing toward the ultimate civilization of an almost untamable race. It was only in these early years that the white man and the Indian truly understood each other. Very rarely has any Indian agent or army officer, however wide their experience, displayed that intimate acquaintance with the tribes and knowledge of the native character, that was possessed by the trader and trapper. Fortunate would it have been if this practical experience had been turned to proper account and if these trained men had oftener been employed by the government in transacting its business with the Indians.

The cause of science has repeatedly acknowledged its indebtedness to the fur trade. Maximilian, Nuttall, Audubon, Nicollet, Catlin, and many others enjoyed facilities for work in that wild country which would have been impossible without the assistance of the trader. This was particularly true of those researches which related to the early life, customs, and tribal history of the Indians; to the fauna and flora of the country; and to the geography of a region which was *terra incognita* when the trader entered it.

Finally the nation owes a debt of gratitude to those resolute pioneers, who, single-handed and alone, stood their ground against their British rivals between the Great Lakes and the Rocky mountains. Their valiant bearing prevented in a large degree those international complications which

so often threatened the peace of the two countries along other portions of the frontier.

The fur trade, therefore, had a real and potent influence upon the history of the West — an influence imperfectly understood as yet, but which will be more fully recognized as time goes on. It is the purpose of this work to promote an appreciation of its importance by presenting a history of THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE OF THE FAR WEST during the period of its principal operations in that extensive region. The subject has never yet been dealt with in a comprehensive way, and many of its important transactions are as little known as if they had not taken place. Writers of Western history have, to a great extent, neglected these earlier events, giving their attention first to that which occurred last, and have thus left a goodly portion of the field worked over scarcely at all. Excepting a few important works dealing with special features, the history of the American fur trade has never heretofore received any particular attention.

In fixing upon a logical order of presenting the subject much embarrassment has been experienced on account of the heterogeneous character of the material to be dealt with. The events have been so diverse, and have borne so little relation to each other, that the task of making a connected narrative has been well-nigh impossible. Irving, in his masterly treatment of certain enterprises of the American fur trade, has handled this difficulty in a way that leaves little to be desired. Along with the run of his story he constantly introduces, without violence or apparent effort, descriptions of scenery, fauna and flora, men and manners, anecdotes of personal adventure, sketches of prominent characters, comments and criticisms — and all in such harmonious fashion that the lack of connection between the various parts would scarcely be noticed by the general reader. But in a work which attempts to give a comprehensive view of the entire field, this method did not seem admissible. It was considered essential to segregate cognate subjects as far as possible under separate heads so as to present at a

single view each phase of the general theme. The result has been a five-fold division of the work with smaller classifications under each.

Part I. treats of the business of the fur trade in its several bearings and describes its characteristic features. The business was a peculiar one in many respects, and an understanding of its peculiarities is essential to an understanding of its history.

Part II. is the narrative proper of the events of the fur trade and follows their order chronologically as far as is possible and preserve the continuity of distinct subjects. It comprises the bulk of the work and the principal results of its researches.

Part III. is an account of those events which did not pertain directly to the fur trade, but which transpired in the country and at the time in which the fur trade was being carried on. Indirectly they were all connected with that business.

Part IV. contains descriptions of a few of the more noteworthy events and characters of the fur trade which stand out by themselves as interesting incidents apart from their particular bearing upon the course of the narrative.

Part V. undertakes to give a general view of the country in which the trans-Mississippi fur trade flourished, together with some notice of its fauna and flora and of its native inhabitants. Its purpose is solely to present a picture of the country as it appeared to the practical eye of the trader, and not at all to discuss it in exhaustive detail or from a technical standpoint. In strictly logical order this portion of the subject was entitled to precedence in the arrangement of parts, but as it was in reality of secondary importance to the main purpose, it was placed last. It is hoped that this subordination of position may not divert from it the attention it deserves as an explanatory adjunct to the entire work. Particularly in the matter of geographical nomenclature and discovery it contains the results of much historical research.

Some of the rarer and more important original documents which have been used in preparing this work are presented in the Appendix. To the critical student, and even to the general reader, there will be much of genuine interest in these living pictures of a forgotten past.

For the more complete elucidation of the subject a map of the trans-Mississippi country has been prepared showing it as it was in 1843. The preparation of this map has been a greater labor than its lines and letters, skilfully as these are made, might lead one to suppose, and upon many points it will give a better idea than can be had from unaided written description. The drawing was executed by Mr. Paul Burgoldt of St. Louis, Mo., one of the ablest artists in this kind of work that the country affords.

In assembling the data for this work more than ordinary difficulties have been encountered. No general authorities were available. Except in two instances the transactions of the Western fur trade did not fall within the purview of the public press, and the scattering references in eastern periodicals are seldom of much value. The era of government exploration not having yet set in there are very few official reports that deal directly with the subject. A large amount of information is scattered through the many narratives of adventure which appeared at this time, but these works, unfortunately for the present purpose, were mostly written to make good stories, and abound in exaggerations at the expense of accurate data. They are a perilous resource to the historian. Finally what may be called original data, consisting of unpublished documents of every description and oral testimony by those who have some personal knowledge of these early events, are scattered as widely as are the posterity of those who helped make the history of the fur trade.

The use of the data brought together from these scattered and dissimilar sources has been scarcely less embarrassing than the process of their collection. It has been necessary to cull from a multitude of authorities — here a

little and there a little — checking one against another until a correct result could be arrived at. Despite the great pains taken in this sifting process, no one is more conscious than the author that only a moderate degree of success has been attained. The wholly unexpected places in which material of the highest value has been found, forcibly suggest that a great deal more may have been overlooked. In truth, there is scattered throughout the country, in every variety of hiding-place, documents of true historic value which might become public knowledge did their owners but realize their worth. Evidence has constantly presented itself of the existence of valuable journals kept by those who were once prominent in the far-west country, but where they are now it is impossible to say. Every little while an interesting letter or other document falls under the eye of some one who understands its worth and is brought to public knowledge. This process will doubtless continue for many years to come. But if it must be admitted that much has escaped discovery in these researches, it is believed that the essential facts relating to all the events herein described have been determined.

Of the many published works consulted, those of Washington Irving and Josiah Gregg are the most important, for they handle in a thoroughly comprehensive and accurate way the special subjects of which they treat. *Astoria, Captain Bonneville*, and the *Commerce of the Prairies* will never be surpassed in their particular fields.

Maximilian Prince of Wied is the most reliable published authority upon the early history of the American Fur Company on the upper Missouri. The extensive library of Americana belonging to the Hon. Peter Koch of Bozeman, Montana, himself a discriminating student of early Western history, possesses the very unusual treasure of a copy of Maximilian's book. The loan of this work during several months made it possible to draw from the distinguished author much information, which, in an ordinary perusal, would have been overlooked.

Captains Lewis and Clark, the first official explorers of the Missouri and Columbia valleys; Lieutenant Pike, the pioneer explorer of the southwest; David Thompson and Alexander Henry the younger, who crossed the continent in 1813 in the service of the Northwest Fur Company; Charles Larpenteur, "*Forty years a Fur Trader on the upper Missouri,*" and Francisco Garcés, a Spanish pioneer of the Colorado valley, left journals which have recently had the good fortune to be published, either in original or new editions, under the editorship of the late Dr. Elliott Coues, who gave to this work the ten years of his life immediately preceding his untimely death. The intrinsic value of these journals in themselves is scarcely greater than that of the copious editorial commentary which accompanies them. Both have been freely used in this work, while equally important has been the direct assistance received from Dr. Coues in the course of a long and interesting correspondence.

Mrs. Frances Fuller Victor, the historian of Oregon and Washington, has woven around the biography of the trapper Joseph Meek a very complete account of the desultory operations of the mountain traders between 1830 and 1840. Her contributions to Bancroft's history of the Western states likewise contain a great deal relating to the fur trade. The extensive fund of information collected through a lifetime devoted to these studies has been freely tendered through the medium of correspondence for use in the present work.

Father P. J. De Smet, the distinguished Jesuit missionary, holds an eminent place as an authority upon the pioneer history of the Rocky mountain region. The correspondence relating to his travels was extensive and most of it has been published. It is a rich treasure house of facts relating to those early times.

The writings of travelers who visited these remote regions and published narratives of their experiences, or left journals which have since been edited by other hands, are

the next most important reliance. Bradbury and Brackenridge are the standard authorities upon the first part of the overland Astorian expedition and upon contemporary events along the Missouri river. Franchère, Cox, Ross, and Henry all wrote of the transactions of the Pacific Fur Company during its short career upon the Columbia. Zenas Leonard, W. A. Ferris, Thomas Nuttall, J. K. Townsend, Thomas J. Farnham, F. A. Wislizenus, Audubon the naturalist, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, John B. Wyeth, Jacob Fowler, and the Reverend Samuel Parker are among those writers who have done most to preserve the history of this early period.

There are other publications which deal with the same subjects but in a less careful way, being narratives of personal adventure in which a thrilling recital was the principal object in view. Among the better works of this class may be mentioned *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains* by Rufus Sage, and *Scenes and Adventures in the United States Army* by P. St. G. Cooke. The romance by Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West*, is a useful work, as is also the extravagant autobiography of James P. Beckwourth. Coyner's *Lost Trappers* is an example of a vicious method of writing occasionally indulged in by these early authors who manufactured their narratives out of whole cloth and advertised them to the public as truthful history.

There is much relating to the fur trade scattered through government publications, though not as a general thing easily accessible. A few official reports have fortunately been rescued from "public document" oblivion through the labors of private editors. *Lewis and Clark, Pike and Long* can now be found in any good library, but it is only in the more elaborate collections that the reports of Nicollet and others of equal value may be seen. The earlier government publications, such as the *American State Papers*, are to be found in only the very best libraries. They are rich in material pertaining to early military and Indian problems; but like the hidden ore of the mountains it is to be had only

by patient and laborious mining. Seldom indeed has the government scattered its wealth of information in surface deposits where it can be had by mere superficial digging.

The historical societies of Wisconsin, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Montana have published much relating to the history of the fur trade; and have collected many documents bearing upon its various features. In most instances this material has been gratuitously tendered for use in connection with these researches.

Such are the principal sources of information herein relied upon which can be found in the more complete libraries. Convenient access to most of them has been afforded by the Mercantile Library of St. Louis, through the courtesy of its librarian, Mr. Horace Kephart. The admirable collection of works pertaining to trans-Mississippi history which this library contains has been constantly at the author's service throughout these studies. But for the facilities thus afforded he would have found his task well-nigh impossible.

Important as have been the data derived from the foregoing sources, the main dependence has been upon original documents many of which are here brought to public attention for the first time. Among these may be included the early Missouri newspapers of St. Louis and Franklin. Although, strictly speaking, these papers should be classed as published authorities, they are not so in the sense of those just enumerated. They are practically inaccessible to the general public, for only a single complete file of each is still in existence.

The *Missouri Gazette* was the first newspaper published west of the Mississippi river. It began its career May 12, 1808. The title was changed to *Louisiana Gazette* December 7, 1809, and back to *Missouri Gazette* July 18, 1812. On March 20, 1822, the name was changed to *Missouri Republican*. This paper was the progenitor of the modern *St. Louis Republic*, and a nearly complete file is still preserved in the vaults of the *Republic* office. Through the indulgence of the proprietors of this journal the entire file

down to 1850 has been examined in connection with this work. It abounds in valuable data and is the sole existing authority upon many obscure points. There were other St. Louis newspapers during much of the fur trade era, but they have not been so carefully preserved and are of less value than the old *Gazette*.

The *Missouri Intelligencer and Boone's Lick Advertiser* began its career in the little town of Franklin which stood (until the Missouri claimed it) on the opposite bank from the modern city of Boonville, Missouri, two hundred miles above the mouth of the river. It was for years the westernmost newspaper in the United States, and being directly on the route of travel to the West, it contained many valuable references to the early expeditions. These references are particularly important in the case of the Santa Fe trade which had its origin in Franklin. The files of this paper have been examined through the courtesy of Mr. Irvin Switzler of Columbia, Missouri, their present custodian, and by the assistance of Professor Garland C. Broadhead, late State Geologist of Missouri.

Niles Register, which is so valuable a mine of historic data, borrows most of its items pertaining to the trans-Mississippi territory during this period from the St. Louis and Franklin papers.

By far the most important collection of original data that has been consulted is the mass of documents relating to the Missouri and American Fur Companies, now in the possession of Mr. Pierre Chouteau of St. Louis, grandson of the distinguished fur merchant, the late Pierre Chouteau. These documents comprise correspondence, journals, records of business accounts and other papers, some of them dating back into the eighteenth century. Many of them are in the French language and a few in the Spanish. Those pertaining to the later years of the trade are nearly all in English. There are occasionally gaps and omissions and many documents have evidently been lost, or their present whereabouts are unknown; but enough are still in existence to

settle most of the doubtful points upon the operations of the St. Louis traders. Mr. Pierre Chouteau has afforded every facility for examining these papers, and the enormous labor of going through them, musty and dusty with fifty to a hundred years of St. Louis atmosphere, has been patiently performed. To the kindness of Mr. Chouteau and of his father, the late C. P. Chouteau, whatever merit there may be in result of these researches is largely due.

Mr. M. L. Gray of St. Louis, administrator of the Sublette estate, has come into possession of much of the Ashley-Sublette-Campbell-Smith correspondence. Though limited in scope, these papers are the sole existing authority upon many points connected with the history of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Mr. Gray has generously authorized such use of them as was desired.

Mrs. William Mulkey of Kansas City, Missouri, daughter of the fur trader Andrew Drips, possesses much of the early correspondence of her distinguished father. That portion which relates to the special work of Major Drips as Indian agent for the tribes of the upper Missouri from 1842 to 1846 contains exhaustive data upon the history of that period.

Under the painstaking direction of Mr. William Seever, late secretary of the Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis, many original documents have been collected, and these likewise have been carefully examined. The more important are the journal of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition of 1825, and several unpublished essays upon early frontier history by William Waldo and others.

The late Captain Joseph La Barge, the most noted pilot of the Missouri river, whose experience upon that stream dated from 1832 and extended to the collapse of the steamboat business, and whose memory retained its power to a remarkable degree even in old age, was an eye witness of some of the events herein related and was personally acquainted with most of the actors. His oral testimony has been freely used throughout this work. There is in the possession of

the La Barge family in St. Louis an old log book of the American Fur Company containing the record of the annual steamboat voyages up the Missouri for most of the decade from 1840 to 1850. This venerable record has been very useful in checking dates, events, and places.

The old legal papers in the Recorder's office in St. Louis contain much information bearing upon the transactions of the traders.

Through the accidents of fortune to which carelessness, if nothing worse, has more than once subjected the most valuable documents, the old records of the United States Indian Superintendency of St. Louis, for the tribes residing west of the Mississippi, were thrown away and would have been lost but for the diligence of a second-hand book dealer who thought them worth preserving. Some of these records were purchased by the Kansas Historical Society and are now preserved in the State Capitol at Topeka, where an opportunity was had of examining them. They are full of interesting data concerning the fur trade era down to 1830.

The American Fur Company letter books, open for inspection to visitors at the John Jacob Astor Hotel on Mackinaw Island, Michigan, contain practically the only reliable data upon the earlier operations of the company.

Captain Edwin L. Berthoud of Golden, Colorado, a careful student of the pioneer history of the West, improved the exceptional opportunities afforded him as engineer on the early Union Pacific surveys to collect much valuable information relating to events and characters of the fur trade. This information has been freely drawn upon throughout the present investigation.

Of the many other sources of information whose importance is only less than that of those already enumerated it would be impossible to make individual mention within the compass of these pages, but the author's debt to them is none the less gratefully acknowledged.

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THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE

OF

THE FAR WEST.

PART I. THE FUR TRADE.

CHAPTER I.

CHARACTER OF THE BUSINESS.

Importance of the fur trade—Era of the fur trade—St. Louis—Communication with New York—Furs and peltries—Methods of securing furs—Fur trade merchandise—Profits of the trade—Magnitude of the business—Number of persons employed—Losses of life and property.

IT is not an easy thing, at this period in American history, to appreciate how great a place in the affairs of former times the fur trade occupied. The trade has not by any means become extinct, nor, perhaps, greatly diminished in volume, if at all, as one may readily see by examining the statistics of sales in the leading markets of the world today. It is only in a relative sense that it has become less important. While it has remained stationary, other lines of trade have expanded many fold, until now it is almost lost sight of in the vast current of the world's affairs. Yet it is not long since it was a leading branch of commerce in the western world, nor more than sixty years since it was almost the only business transacted in the immense territory west of the Mississippi.

The fur trade of the Missouri valley began early in the eighteenth century, but it did not assume large proportions until after the cession of Louisiana to the United States and the exploring expeditions of Lewis and Clark and Pike. Its career thereafter continued practically unchecked until the tide of Western emigration set in, about 1843. The true period of the trans-Mississippi fur trade therefore embraces the thirty-seven years from 1807 to 1843.

In this trade the city of St. Louis was the principal, **if not** the only, emporium. It is true that the headquarters of the American Fur Company and of some other fur-trading concerns were in New York, but even in these cases the actual base from which all operations in the Western country were carried on was the city at the mouth of the Missouri. All parties were organized and all outfits were made up there. The returns of the trade en route to market all passed that way. Most of the traders resided there, and all non-resident firms maintained houses there. Great establishments arose for the convenience of the trade, while the port of St. Louis became a center of commerce almost as widespread as that of New York itself.

In the earlier years communication with New York and other seaboard towns took place principally by way of the Ohio river or the Great Lakes. In the latter case the route was sometimes by way of the Illinois river to Lake Michigan, thence either by water or across the country to Detroit, thence to Black Rock near Buffalo, and thence overland to New York; at other times it was by way of the Mississippi, the Fox and Wisconsin rivers to Lake Michigan, and the rest of the way by the route just described. In later years, after the use of steamboats became general, commerce usually passed by way of New Orleans.

The business of the fur trade, as the name implies, was mainly a traffic in furs and peltries. There were the fine furs obtained from the beaver, otter, mink, fox, and other animals, and the coarser products such as buffalo robes, bear and deer skins, which were not used as furs so much as for

lap robes, heavy coats, and the like. Besides the furs and peltries there were regularly brought to St. Louis cargoes of buffalo tongues, buffalo and bear's tallow, and limited quantities of other products. The trade from the southwest, particularly from Santa Fe, dealt more largely in horses, mules, and specie.

There were several methods of procuring furs. The one most generally resorted to, and which on the whole yielded the largest results, was by traffic with the Indians. The first thought of the trader on going to a tribe of Indians was to supply himself with those articles which he knew had an attraction for the native fancy, to a large extent things of trifling value, but of showy appearance. The white man valued the native furs altogether beyond what the Indian was able to comprehend, and the latter was only too happy to find that he could trade them for that gaudy and glittering wealth which had been brought from a great distance to his country. Thus, in the early intercourse of the white man with the Indian, each gave to the other something that he valued lightly, and received in return something that he valued highly, and each felt a keen contempt for the stupid taste of the other. The trade, thus begun by imposition on the one side and ignorance on the other, developed, upon more thorough acquaintance, into a regular system.

All the fur companies regularly employed hunters and trappers who killed buffalo and caught beaver and gathered such other furs as came in their way. These men worked at fixed wages, and the product of their labor belonged to the company. No goods were brought into the country for furs taken in this way, except in payment of the men's wages, which were generally absorbed as fast as earned in new outfits and in liquor or feasting.

A third source from which the products of the country were obtained was the free hunter and trapper. These men worked on their own account, being bound to no company, and generally sold the product of their labor at some regu-

lar trading post or rendezvous, although they occasionally went to St. Louis with it themselves. A large portion of the payment for their furs, if sold in the interior, was in the form of articles required for new outfits, and for tobacco and liquor. The free trappers worked only in the finer kinds of fur.

It thus appears that, from whatever source the trader obtained his furs, he generally paid for them in merchandise carried into the country. This merchandise comprised such articles as were used in traffic with the Indians and for the equipments of trappers and hunters, the more necessary articles of food which could not be obtained from the country, and finally plenty of liquor and tobacco. To convey a clear idea of the variety of articles in a trading equipment, as well as the prices at which they were rated in the mountains, an extract is given in the accompanying footnote from the bill of sale by which General William H. Ashley transferred his outfit to the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette, near Great Salt Lake, July 18, 1826.¹

¹The invoice included "gunpowder of the first and second quality at one dollar fifty per pound, lead one dollar per pound, shot one dollar twenty-five cents per pound, three point blankets at nine dollars each, green ditto at eleven dollars each, scarlet cloth at six dollars per yard, blue ditto common quality from four to five dollars per yard, butcher knives at seventy-five cents each, two and a half point blankets at seven dollars each, North West fuzils at twenty-four dollars each, tin kettles different sizes at two dollars per pound, sheet iron kettles at two dollars twenty-five cents per pound, square axes at two dollars fifty cents each, beaver traps at nine dollars each, sugar at one dollar per pound, coffee at one dollar and twenty-five cents a pound, raisins at one dollar fifty cents per pound, grey cloth of common quality at five dollars per yard, flannel common quality at one dollar fifty cents per yard, calicoes assorted at one dollar per yard, domestic cotton at one dollar twenty-five cents per yard, thread assorted at three dollars per pound, worsted binding at fifteen dollars per gross, finger rings at five dollars per gross, beads assorted at two dollars fifty cents per pound, vermilion at three dollars per pound, files assorted at two dollars fifty cents per pound, fourth proof rum reduced at thirteen dollars fifty cents per gallon, bridles assorted at seven dollars each, spurs at two dollars per pair, horse shoes and nails at two dollars per pound, tin pans

A large proportion of the merchandise of certain classes was imported from Europe, for at this early day American manufactures, in blankets and cloths particularly, were so inferior that the Indians did not want them, having learned through the British traders what a really good article was. It thus happened that while the furs found their principal market in Europe, the merchandise for which they were traded was mostly manufactured there. It would be interesting to trace an invoice of fur-trade merchandise from the manufactories of Europe in those early days to New York, New Orleans, St. Louis, and thence to the remote and obscure trading posts in the heart of the wilderness; and there, where the innocent beaver falls a victim to the wily trapper, to witness the exchange of these goods for his rich coat of fur, and to follow the latter back through St. Louis, New York, and London, to its final destination in the comfortable garments of the aristocracy of Europe. The complete round occupied fully four years. Could we know the price of the merchandise as it left the factory and its equivalent in fur as sold in the completed garment, the increase would be found to be several hundred per cent. This did not, of course, all represent profit. The insurance by sea, the losses by river and land, particularly in the Indian country, and the services of the many hands through which both the merchandise and the furs had to pass, account to some extent for the increase; but there was still a heavy increment that represented the profits of the trader. That these profits

assorted at two dollars per pound, handkerchiefs assorted at one dollar fifty cents each, ribbons assorted at three dollars per bolt, buttons at five dollars per gross, looking glasses at fifty cents each, flints at fifty cents per dozen, mockasin awls at twenty-five cents per dozen, tobacco at one dollar twenty-five cents per pound, copper kettles at three dollars per pound, iron buckles assorted at two dollars fifty cents per pound, fire steels at two dollars per pound, dried fruit at one dollar and fifty cents per pound, washing soap at one dollar twenty-five cents per pound, shaving soap at two dollars per pound, first quality James river tobacco at one dollar seventy-five cents per pound, steel bracelets at one dollar fifty cents per pair, large brass wire at two dollars per pound."

were enormous is sufficiently attested by the immense fortunes which were made in the fur trade.

In the matter of profits and losses, as well as in that of volume of business, there are numerous early authorities. Nathaniel J. Wyeth, a close observer, though rather too optimistic, has left on record an estimate of what a well-managed hunting expedition, in the best days of the fur trade, might reasonably be expected to accomplish.² According to this estimate the cost of an invoice of merchandise at the Teton mountains, or in that vicinity, was about four hundred per cent of its first cost in the eastern market. This increase was taken up by the expenses of interest, insurance, wagons, provisions for food until the buffalo country was reached, horses and mules, pack and riding saddles, blankets, pack covers, halters, bridles, horse shoeing, and other expenses incidental to the transportation of the goods across the plains. If the furs were obtained through hired trappers, the wages were paid in goods at an advance of about six hundred per cent upon their cost in the mountains. The wages of a hunter being counted at four hundred dollars per year and of common men who did the work of camp at two hundred, a party of twenty hunters and ten camp keepers, with their necessary horses (which "cost about \$4 in goods prime cost in Boston or New York") could be kept in the field for one year for not to exceed two thousand dollars. With average success each hunter would take one hundred and twenty beaver skins in this time, the value of which, in Boston or New York, was about one thousand dollars. With due allowance for the cost of the return journey, the outlay of two thousand dollars would net in the neighborhood of fifteen thousand dollars. "This, as you will perceive, will leave a large profit," is the logical deduction by the author of this simple calculation. Of course such successful enterprises were of rare occurrence, for there were many sources of loss in these perilous expeditions, but there are nevertheless authenticated instances of

² *Sources of the History of Oregon*, pp. 66 and 75.

very high profits. In 1827 the house of Bernard Pratte and Company joined with General Ashley in equipping an expedition for the mountains. The whole enterprise lasted only about six months and netted the company seventy per cent profit on their investment.

In the Santa Fe trade forty per cent was a high profit, while the average was between fifteen and twenty per cent.

In regard to the magnitude of the trade it is difficult to give definite figures; but the following table of statistics compiled about 1832 by Indian Agent John Dougherty, embracing the fifteen years from 1815 to 1830, gives a fair idea, not only of the extent of the trade, but of the wages paid, the prices of furs, and the profits realized, during this period.³

EXPENDITURES.

| | |
|--|------------|
| 20 clerks, 15 years, @ \$500 per year..... | \$ 150,000 |
| 200 men, 15 years, @ \$150 per year..... | 450,000 |
| Merchandise | 1,500,000 |

RETURNS.

| | |
|---|-------------|
| 26,000 buffalo skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ \$3 each.. | \$1,170,000 |
| 25,000 beaver skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ \$4 each.. | 1,500,000 |
| 4,000 otter skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ \$3 each.... | 180,000 |
| 12,000 coon skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ 25c. each.. | 45,000 |
| 150,000 lbs. deer skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ 33c. per lb..... | 742,500 |
| 37,500 muskrat skins per yr. for 15 yrs. @ 20c. each. | 112,500 |
| Total | \$3,750,000 |
| Total profit..... | \$1,650,000 |
| Average annual expenditure..... | \$ 140,000 |
| Average annual returns..... | 250,000 |
| Average annual profit..... | 110,000 |

At an anniversary celebration of the founding of St.

³The actual number of persons engaged in the fur trade, either as traders or employers, it is impossible to determine with accuracy; but it was not large. Including those who traded to Santa Fe, it is not probable that the number ever exceeded one thousand, while the average was nearer half that number. Judged by the volume of business alone the fur trade was of relatively insignificant proportions; but its importance and historic interest depend upon other and quite different considerations.

1,000

Louis, held on the 15th of February, 1847, it was stated that the annual value of the St. Louis fur trade for the past forty years had been between two and three hundred thousand dollars; and this may be taken as a fair estimate for the period covered by our present studies.

The losses incident to the business of the fur trade were, in the very nature of things, large. They arose almost entirely from encounters with hostile Indians and involved both life and property. The danger of losing horses was an ever present peril, for even friendly Indians had no compunctions about stealing these animals. Reliable statistics covering the period from 1820 to 1831 give the losses of life from the Indians at one hundred and fifty-one and the loss of property at a hundred thousand dollars. It is probable that, for the entire period from 1806 to 1843, these figures should be doubled.⁴

Such is a general view of the American fur trade as conducted from St. Louis during the first half of the nineteenth century. Its more important special features, such as its relation to the Indians, the traffic in liquor, the evils of competition among the traders, the class of men engaged in the business, and the kind of life which it developed, will be separately considered.

⁴ According to Andrew Drips there died at the hands of the Indians in the year 1844 thirteen employes of the licensed traders and nine free trappers.

CHAPTER II.

RELATIONS WITH THE INDIANS.

Importance of the Indian to the fur trade—Relation of the trader and the Indian—Policy of the government toward the Indian—The factory system—Mistake of the government—Downfall of the system.

THE most important single factor in the business of the fur trade was the presence of the Indian in the country where that trade was carried on. It controlled the whole system of conducting the business. To a considerable extent the Indians were themselves the producers: that is, they trapped the beaver and hunted the buffalo, whose skins they exchanged for whatever the white men brought into their country. Even when the companies did their own trapping it was necessary to take account of the Indian, for he did not always approve of the invasion of his country by the paleface, and often resisted it by force. The hunting and trapping parties had therefore to be ever on the alert lest they fall victims to a crafty and savage foe.

Had there been no native inhabitants in the country the conduct of the fur trade would have been radically different. All the furs would have been taken directly by the hunters and trappers. There would have been but few permanent posts instead of the many that were required to accommodate the various tribes. No merchandise would have been carried into the interior to exchange for furs, for there would have been no one to exchange it with. The innumerable tragedies of the plains, in which so many brave men lost their lives, would not have taken place. It is indeed difficult to estimate the degree to which the fur trade was controlled by the Indian, while its far-reaching counter-

influence upon the tribes cannot, at this remote time, be adequately realized.

X The relation of the trader to the Indian was the most natural and congenial of any which the two races have ever sustained toward each other. Properly conducted, it fitted perfectly with the Indian's previous mode of life, really promoted his happiness, and gave him no cause for complaint. It enabled him to pursue his natural occupation of hunting, while it introduced just enough of the civilized customs of exchange to furnish him with those simpler articles which directly promoted the comfort of his daily life. The Indian likewise fitted in perfectly with the white man's purposes of trade. It was better that the native occupant of the soil, so far as practicable, should garner its resources and bring them in for exchange, than that the white hunters should scatter themselves in lawless bands over the country for this purpose. By far the larger part of the fur was taken by the Indians and came into the possession of the traders only by exchange, and it was in this traffic that the white man first made his acquaintance with the tribes. From this starting point the two races came gradually into closer contact until finally the Indian became dependent upon his white brother, relinquishing little by little his former method of life, acquiring new wants, becoming corrupted by new vices, and drifting insensibly into that intricate relationship with the United States government which is known in our history as the Indian Question.

It would be alike idle and unjust at this period of our national history to arraign the methods of the government in its dealings with the Indians—idle because the past is behind us; unjust because, whatever its failures, the purposes of the government towards the native races within its domain have ever been those of paternal benevolence. A fundamental misconception of the nature of the Indian problem underlies the common assumption that a very different result might and ought to have ensued, and that the policy of our government in its treatment of the Indian has been

actuated by motives unworthy of an enlightened people. It ignores the operation of that evolutionary process by which a weaker race disappears before a superior in spite of all that laws or military force can do to prevent. That the aboriginal tribes were doomed to complete displacement on the soil of their nativity after once the European races had discovered this continent is a proposition that few will care to deny. A change so fundamental, involving loss of land, institutions, customs, and the innermost functions of social life, was not one that could be accomplished without pain and apparent wrong. But the change was as inevitable as the progress of the stars, and the only ground for criticism of those concerned in it is whether or not they have unnecessarily added to its burden of sorrow and suffering.

The policy of government, so far as it has been able to control this course of unavoidable change, has always been the highest good of the Indian. While it was powerless to save the Indian's lands, or to preserve his customs from extinction, it has ever sought to ameliorate an unhappy situation and to secure the most ample reparation for an irreparable loss. The failures of the government have never been those of purpose, but rather those of lack of ability to carry its purposes into effect. The very nature of our government, essentially weak in controlling its citizens and in exercising arbitrary interference with what they deem to be their rights, was a powerful drawback as compared with the more centralized power of a government like that of Great Britain. This weakness showed itself particularly in those details of administration by which its humane and benevolent purposes were to have been accomplished. The prostitution of the Indian service to mere personal or partisan advantage, and the placing of those delicate and vital questions at the mercy of political adventurers, were crimes which must ever leave a stain on the American name. Herein, whether avoidably or not, the government has been irredeemably at fault. It has sinned knowingly — sinned with the consequences patent to its eyes — and from the

paltriest and basest of motives that can guide the policy of a nation.

Two examples bearing directly upon our present work will be cited to show how strong has been the purpose of the government to deal justly by the Indian, but how helpless it has been in carrying out this purpose. The first is that of the government factory system established to control the trade with the Indians, and the second is that of the abolition of the liquor traffic in the Indian country.

The factory system which prevailed during the first two decades of the century arose from a growing conviction on the part of the government that a solution of the Indian question could not be indefinitely postponed; and that, however it might be deferred by moving the Indians farther and farther West, it would ever arise anew and clamor for settlement. It was therefore better to grapple with it seriously from the start, and to this end it was important that the government should stand in closer relations with the tribes. It was justly concluded that it would be wiser for the government to conduct the Indian trade itself. It could thus secure to the Indian his due, protect him from imposition, save him from the deadly effects of alcohol, and wean him gradually from his tribal life, so that, when the tide of settlement should have swallowed up his domains and have destroyed his ancient means of subsistence, he would accept his new situation without deep reluctance. ¹

To this end Congress in 1796 made an appropriation for the establishment of a "liberal trade with the Indians." Factories or trading houses were located at various points in the Indian country, at which was kept the usual line of Indian goods. ² It was intended to dispose of these goods

¹ "These views are substantially founded upon the conviction that it is the true policy and earnest desire of the government to draw its savage neighbors within the pale of civilization."

W. H. CRAWFORD, Secretary of War.

² The factories were mainly located east of the Mississippi, and only one on the Missouri, viz., at Fort Osage, forty miles below the present site of Kansas City.

to the Indians in exchange for furs at rates which would simply make the factories self-sustaining. In this way the Indian would get his goods at cost, an advantage which it was thought would be so palpable that he would patronize the factories in preference to the private trader.

The system was well conceived and it should have succeeded. The reason why it did not succeed is perfectly apparent and must have been so at the time. The government did not have the courage of its convictions. It should have taken the field to itself, just as it does in the carrying of mails, the coining of money, and the making of war. Instead of doing this it granted trading licenses to private parties and thus degraded itself to the level of a competing trader among a horde of irresponsible and frequently lawless rivals. The fate of the factory system was thus sealed from the beginning. The practices of the private traders were not such as the government could afford to permit in its agents. It was a part of the government plan to let the Indians hunt as of old, untrammelled by the presence of the white man, and bring furs to the factory for sale. It was also, though probably unwisely, a rule not to supply the Indians on credit, hoping, rather chimerically, to inculcate habits of thrift in this way. The shrewd private trader promptly took advantage of this situation. He advanced an outfit on credit to the improvident Indian when about to start on his hunt, and thus virtually laid a mortgage on the products of his labor. He did not await his debtor's return, but made payment sure by accompanying him on his hunts, and securing his furs as fast as they were taken.

The factories would not dispense liquor to the natives, but the private trader smuggled it into the country and was thus armed with that weapon, which, more than any other, was certain of victory in any contest for the favor of the Indian.

The factories did not use the best articles in their trade, for the rule of requiring the government to patronize home industries, even when to its great disadvantage, excluded it from the markets where the best goods were to be

had. It was thus handicapped again, for the Indian was not slow to note the difference between the goods offered him by the government and those brought to him by the private trader.

The trader who followed the Indians in their hunts was usually well acquainted with them, understood their language and customs and was virtually one of themselves. The government trader, on the other hand, was a salaried official, most likely a political employe, not versed in the business of dealing with the Indians, and essentially a stranger to them.

The government, moreover, in its intercourse with the Indians, was slow to grasp the fact that it was not dealing with experienced business men, but with children. It made them few presents, and often failed to observe those childish formalities so essential in the eyes of the punctilious savage. The private trader profited by all this, and in spite of the cheaper price of goods at the factories, he often succeeded in securing the greater part of the trade.

It is apparent that none of these drawbacks would have had any weight if private traders had been excluded from the field. The government could not descend to their methods consistently with the policy of dignified bearing and paternal regard for its dependents, which were to be the chief aim and end of its proposed system of trade. It should therefore have saved itself from the humiliation of these small rivalries and competitions by taking the entire field to itself. It would have been in every way better for all concerned, except the individual trader. It is a common fallacy to assume that, because the government may not be able to compete with private individuals in the transaction of a particular business, it therefore cannot transact that business as well as they. No mistake could be greater. The fact that the government may be driven from a field, because it will not stoop to the methods of private competition, is no reason to assume that, if sole occupant, it would not render the public better service than private parties would.

The fatal error is to enter the field as a competitor, for this deprives the government of the power to carry out its better ideas, and at once degrades it to the standards of business employed against it.

So it was in the case under consideration. A system established for the good of the Indians soon became, in these untoward circumstances, unpopular with its beneficiaries, and excited the contempt of those untutored beings who were little prone to investigate hidden causes, but always judged from superficial appearances. In proportion as it fell in the esteem of the Indians the traders became bold in their outcries against it. The great American Fur Company was its most formidable assailant through the aggressive attacks of Ramsay Crooks,³ that clear-headed, incisive, and fearless man of affairs who had risen to the general agency of the company. He was ably seconded by the St. Louis traders and the campaign in Congress was skilfully handled by that astute leader (or rather, follower) of the people, Missouri's greatest statesman, Senator Thomas H. Benton. The fight was a prolonged and severe one, for the government defended the system with a consciousness of its high merits and of the fact that it had never had half a chance for its life. The struggle ended in the overthrow of the system in March, 1822.

In spite of certain defects of management the factory system, during its twenty-six years' existence, clearly established its ability to fulfil the expectations of its founders. No better evidence of this need be sought than in the

³ The vigorous manner in which Crooks attacked the factory system is well illustrated in the forcible language with which he congratulated Senator Benton upon its overthrow. "I have been honored this morning," he wrote on April 1, 1822, "with your favor of Friday last and hasten to congratulate you on your decisive victory. . . . The result is the best possible proof of the value to the country of talents, intelligence, and perseverance, and you deserve the unqualified thanks of the community for destroying the pious monster, since to your unwearied exertions and sound practical knowledge of the whole subject the country is indebted for its deliverance from so gross and unholy an imposition [!]."

strenuous efforts of its enemies to get rid of it. The correspondence of the times shows that the factories absorbed a goodly share of the trade. "As it [the Indian trade] now stands," wrote Charles Gratiot to John Jacob Astor in 1814, "it is too precarious for anybody to hazard anything in it unless the factories were to be abolished." The official records show that until near the close of its career, in spite of the obstacles it had to contend with and the losses growing out of the War of 1812, it was self-sustaining.

Thus ended in failure a system fraught with possibilities of great good to the Indian — a system, which, if followed out as it should have been, would have led the Indian to his new destiny by easy stages and would have averted the long and bloody wars, the corruption and bad faith, which have gained for a hundred years of our dealings with the Indians the unenviable distinction of a "Century of Dishonor."

CHAPTER III.

EVIL EFFECTS OF COMPETITION.

Example of the Hudson Bay Company—Weakness of the government—Door thrown open to all—Influence upon the Indians—British competition.

HAVING withdrawn from direct participation in the Indian trade, the obvious duty of the government was to adopt some method of control which should secure to the Indian the benefits intended to flow from the factory system. There was only one way to do this, and that was to grant to some company a monopoly of the trade. The example of the Hudson Bay Company is evidence of the great advantage to all concerned of the exclusion of competition in a business like the Indian trade. Except in those years when that company was struggling for supremacy with the Northwest Company, or when competing with American traders along the border, the conduct of its business was admirably adapted to secure the greatest good to the Indian. The sale of liquor was interdicted. The trade was upon a fixed basis as to prices. The traders were men of long experience with the Indians and nearly all related to them by marriage. In all its bearings the policy pursued by this great company combined what was best in both the factory system and the practice of private traders in the United States. The result was that the company was nearly always at peace with the Indians and avoided those needless misunderstandings which produced such deplorable results south of the boundary.

There can be no doubt that this system of monopoly was better for all concerned than the unrestrained competition

which was the rule among American traders. It was immeasurably better for the Indians. It was much more conducive to the preservation of the fur-bearing animals. It did not operate any more favorably for the few at the head and against the many in the ranks than did the system of trade in the United States; for surely the magnates of the Hudson Bay Company did not outdo Astor, the Chouteaus, the Ashleys, the Campbells, and the Sublettes in the accumulation of fortunes, while the underlings of the great monopoly were in every way better off than those of the American companies.

Here again the government was confronted by its own weakness. The same unreasonable prejudice which drove it out of the Indian trade opposed with tenfold greater vehemence the granting of any exclusive privilege in that trade. The mere suggestion at one time that such a privilege be granted the American Fur Company (for Ramsay Crooks was ready enough to take into the bosom of his company the "pious monster" which he had lately made such exertions to destroy) called forth a storm of protest which caused the matter to be dropped as if it had been a red hot iron. The spirit of American institutions was opposed to monopoly of all kinds, and in a government where the power rests directly with the people, the creation of such a monopoly was an impossibility. Thus, in two essential respects, the government of the United States was powerless to carry out the policy which it knew to be best.

There was only one course left — to make the field free to all comers with special favors to none. That was the true democratic policy but the most unwise that could have been adopted. It opened up that never-ending commercial rivalry in which the survival of the strongest was the only road to supremacy. It was a fatal error, as we shall see, and one that lay at the root of many of our later troubles with the Indians.

The principle thus introduced into the Indian trade was indeed no other than that which obtains in nearly all

from the frequent complaints of the American traders, the matter was a really serious one, but it is not possible to discover any specific instance in which they suffered from this cause. The British had the advantage in this alleged competition of being allowed to import liquor, which was prohibited to the Americans. They could also sell their goods cheaper because Americans had to pay import duty. Both of these matters were made the subject of repeated expostulation with the government by officials of the American Fur Company.¹

¹ Thus, John Jacob Astor to Senator Benton, Jan. 29, 1829: "It is known that none of the woolen goods fit for the Indian trade, such as Indian blankets, strouds, and cloths of particular descriptions, are as yet manufactured in this country. We are therefore obliged to import them from England, and it so happens that those are just the articles paying the heaviest duty. The English traders have theirs free of duty, which enables them to bring their goods 60 per cent and over cheaper than what we pay and they are thereby enabled to undersell us. Their furs and skins cost them little more than half what we have to pay for ours. But this is not all. They are by these means enabled to send their furs here [New York] and actually do come and undersell the American traders. It is unaccountable that they should be permitted to bring their furs here free of duty, while we, if we send any to the British dominions, are obliged to pay 15 per cent duty."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

Desire of the government to exclude liquor from the Indian country — Use of liquor by British traders — The practice of smuggling — Fraudulent use of liquor — Advantages of monopoly — Liquor for boatmen — Competition of the British — Extracts from correspondence — Law prohibiting liquor traffic — Inferences.

THE control of the liquor traffic was the second of the examples previously cited of the helplessness of the government to give effect to its better intentions toward the Indian. The degrading and demoralizing influence of intoxicating spirits upon the Indian was well understood from the experience of two centuries of frontier life. The government earnestly desired to avoid, in its future dealings with these people, a repetition of these evils, and this was one of the considerations which led to the establishment of the factory system. When that system was abandoned, and even before, great care was taken to guard against abuses by private traders who were forbidden to sell liquor to the Indians. They were, however, allowed to take a certain amount on their expeditions for the use of their employes; but when it became apparent that the liquor so taken was most of it *given* (not sold, for that would violate the law!) to the Indians, this privilege was taken away, and the importation of liquor into the Indian country was interdicted altogether. Inspectors were stationed at Leavenworth, Bellevue, and other places to enforce this prohibition.

But the efforts of the government were wholly ineffectual. In opening the door to free competition in the Indian trade, it had nullified in advance any provision which it might

enact for the exclusion of ardent spirits. Liquor was the most powerful weapon which the traders could employ in their struggles with one another. Its attraction for the Indian was irresistible, and by means of it he could be robbed of everything he possessed. No trader could do any business without it if his opponents were supplied with it. It was therefore the one indispensable article which the traders must have at any hazard.¹

Another condition operated to the same end. The British traders made free use of liquor along the border when in competition with the American traders. As they were outside of even the nominal control of the United States Government, the American traders were completely at their mercy unless they could use liquor in their turn. Earnest efforts were made to secure permission to use it in this particular locality, but the government, rightly fearing that a qualified restriction would be of little value, and that liquor once in the Indian country would find its way wherever it was wanted, steadily refused any relaxation of its rules.

There thus arose that stupendous practice of smuggling ardent spirits into the Indian country, which was a prominent feature of the entire history of the Indian trade. The depths of rascality into which this traffic fell might well stagger belief were they not substantiated by the most positive evidence. The liquor was generally imported in the form of alcohol, because of the smaller compass for the same amount of poison. It was stored in every conceivable form of package. In overland journeys it was generally carried in short, flat kegs, which would rest conveniently on the sides of a pack mule. When carried by water it was concealed in flour barrels, bales of merchandise, or anywhere that it would most likely escape discovery. Some

¹“So violent is the attachment of the Indian for it that he who gives most is sure to obtain the furs, while should any one attempt to trade without it he is sure of losing ground with his antagonist. No bargain is ever made without it.” Thomas Biddle to Henry Atkinson, Oct. 29, 1819.

instances of the sharp practice indulged in to avoid detection by government inspectors will presently be given.²

In retailing the poisonous stuff (a pure article never found its way to the Indian) the degree of deception and cheating could not have been carried further. A baneful and noxious substance to begin with, it was retailed with the most systematic fraud, often amounting to a sheer exchange of nothing for the goods of the Indian. It was the policy of the shrewd trader first to get his victim so intoxicated that he could no longer drive a good bargain. The Indian, becoming more and more greedy for liquor, would yield up all he possessed for an additional cup or two. The voracious trader, not satisfied with selling his alcohol at a profit of many thousand per cent, would now begin to cheat in quantity. As he filled the little cup which was the standard of measure, he would thrust in his big thumb and diminish its capacity by one-third. Sometimes he would substitute another cup with the bottom thickened up by running tallow in until it was a third full. He would also dilute the liquor until, as the Indian's senses became more and more befogged, he would treat him to water pure and simple. In all this outrageous imposition, by which the Indian was virtually robbed of his goods, it must be confessed that the tricks of the trader had at least this in their favor that they spared the unhappy and deluded savage from a portion of the liquor which he supposed he was getting. The duplicity and crime for which this unhallowed traffic is responsible in our relations with the Indians have been equalled but seldom in even the most corrupt of nations.

This is another instance where the granting of a monopoly in the trade would have been the better plan. The more responsible companies always deplored the use of liquor, and, moreover, ran great risks of detection if they smuggled it into the country. The American Fur Company, for example, shipped its merchandise in great cargoes up the

² See Part IV., Chapter V.

river, and it was impossible to evade inspection by the authorities at Bellevue or Leavenworth. But the small trader, who either went overland or picked his stealthy way in small craft up the river, could easily escape discovery in that unsettled country. It thus resulted that, while the company would have been glad to join hands with the government in abolishing the liquor traffic, it was met at its distant posts by these lawless adventurers equipped with this never-failing passport to the Indian's favor. It was forced in self-defense to violate the regulations and to become a common smuggler with those who had no standing to lose.

In order that the view here given of the vital importance of the liquor traffic in the business of the fur trade may not appear exaggerated, some extracts will be given from the correspondence of the traders and the observations of travelers during the period when competition was at its height.

The two extracts which follow show how the privileges granted to traders in their annual licenses to trade, before the introduction of liquor into the Indian country was prohibited altogether, were systematically abused: "Permission is hereby granted to William L. Sublette to take to the places designated for carrying on trade. (places enumerated here) not exceeding four hundred and fifty gallons of whiskey for the special use of his boatmen, etc." He was compelled to give bond not to sell liquor to the Indians. The shallowness of this pretext will be apparent when it is known that in the year to which this license relates, 1832, Sublette took his expedition overland all the way to the valley of Pierre's Hole and back and did not have, nor expected to have, occasion to use a single boatman.

Pierre Chouteau, Jr., in a letter to Kenneth McKenzie, dated April 25, 1828, thus explains how liquor was gotten to the posts of the interior at that time: "The government does not allow us to use liquor in our trade with the Indians. On the contrary it is expressly forbidden. But it is permitted to take one gill per day for each boatman during the period of their absence — that is, for twelve months. It is

on this ground that I have obtained permission to take an amount corresponding to fifty men, twenty-seven of whom set out from here and twenty-three are now up the country. I took the names of those who are with you, without knowing whether you will keep them or send them back. That makes no difference, however, for I explained the matter to General Clark." In this way about three hundred gallons of alcohol went up the river to relieve the necessities of the various posts.

When the bill for the absolute prohibition of the importation of liquor into the Indian country was before Congress, John Jacob Astor, in a letter to General W. H. Ashley, member of Congress, dated April 2nd, 1822, thus explained the situation at the upper posts of the Missouri in reference to their British competitors: "Wherever the trade is exclusively in the hands of our own citizens, there can be no doubt that the uniform and complete enforcement of such a law will be beneficial both to the Indians and the traders; but at those points where we come in contact with the Hudson's Bay Company we must either abandon the trade or be permitted to use it, to a limited extent at least, in order to counteract, in some measure, the influence of our rivals, who can introduce any quantity they please.

"Our new posts on the Missouri river above the Mandans must yield to the superior attractions of our opponents, unless the government will permit us like them to use spirituous liquors; and the friendly relations we have at last succeeded in establishing with the Blackfeet (those inveterate enemies of the Americans) at so much expense and personal hazard, must inevitably be destroyed, and the British be restored to the unlimited control they have heretofore exercised over these Indians.

"If the Hudson's Bay Company did not employ ardent spirits against us, we would not ask for a single drop. But without it, competition is hopeless; for the attraction is irresistible; and if the British traders alone possess the temptation, they will unquestionably not only maintain, but

rivet their influence over all the Indians within their reach, to the detriment of the United States, in alienating their affections from us, and in the loss of a trade to which we have an undoubted claim."

The bill nevertheless became a law in the July following.³ There can be no doubt that the American Fur Company looked forward to its possible enforcement with a great deal of misgiving. "The late law," wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to Mr. Astor, "prohibiting absolutely the carrying of liquor to our trading establishments will do us an incalculable injury at all the posts above the mouth of the Yellowstone." Strenuous efforts were made to secure some relaxation in the enforcement of the law, and the arguments used are thus recorded by Ramsay Crooks, who urged them in person before the Secretary of War: "I explained fully to Governor Cass that our sole and only wish for a partial supply was to enable us to cope with our Hudson Bay opponents at our new posts above the Mandans, relinquishing it voluntarily everywhere else as advantageous both to the natives and ourselves. . . . I pointed out the pernicious tendency of its exclusion on our side, while they enjoyed the privilege to an un-

³ An interesting sidelight on the passage of this law is contained in a letter from Ramsay Crooks to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., dated November 16, 1832: "I regret truly the blindness of the government in refusing liquor for the trade of the country in the vicinity of the Hudson's Bay Posts, because the prohibition will not prevent the Indians getting it from our rivals, to our most serious injury. It *might* have been possible last winter at Washington to accomplish some modification had we been there together. I have, however, very strong doubts on the subject, because Gov. Cass is a temperance society man in every sense of the word, and it was with his full consent and approbation that the law for its exclusion from the Indian country was passed by the last Congress, and though I did not go to the Great City, the Chairmen of the Indian Committees were made as fully acquainted with the subject in all its bearings as if I had detailed all the facts to them in person. Had Ashley opposed the bill, his *presumed* knowledge of Indian trade would probably have been more than a match for the influence of the Secretary of War. But it was got up as one of the *government* measures of the session, and your representative, as a good Jackson man, gave it his unqualified support, and secured its passage."

limited extent; and the absolute certainty of the country being deluged by a larger supply than usual, purposely to show their superiority over us, degrading us, and with us the government, in the eyes of the Indians, by our withholding from them a gratification which was abundantly and cheerfully furnished by the British. I also placed before the secretary the dangers of our situation flowing from this source, when stimulated by disappointment, and excited by our rivals to institute comparisons between themselves and us, which inevitably must lead to conclusions altogether unfavorable to the Americans. I pressed upon his attention the efforts we had made at the risk of the lives of our people, and much pecuniary cost, to open an intercourse with our mortal enemies, the Blackfeet, who had on every occasion waged an exterminating war upon our citizens for upward of twenty years — the great value of the trade we had already gained, and the prospect of a large increase we might calculate upon, when, by our peaceful relations with the savages of the Falls of the Missouri and Maria's river, we could extend our intercourse to the Flatheads, and other tribes — and lastly, the loss of influence which the government must sustain in the belief that they would entertain of its poverty, when contrasted with the affluence and liberality of the British, who supplied every want, while we denied them the greatest of all gratifications. I showed him the entire prostration of all the philanthropic hopes of the government in enacting the late law, and tried to convince him that it would do infinitely more harm than good until the article was excluded from the Hudson's Bay territories, as completely as on our side of the boundary.

“To all this the secretary replied, that the law was imperative, and the executive had no discretion but to see it executed to the letter. But as we only desired to use liquor in our own *defense*, it would give him pleasure to bring the subject to the notice of the President and the Secretary of State (in accordance with a wish I expressed when I found that nothing else could be obtained) who, he was sure,

would at once enter into a correspondence with the British, and do all in their power to induce *that* government to exclude from the trade of the Hudson's Bay Company every species of spirituous liquors, as effectually, as by law we have done on our side."

The government adhered strictly to its policy of excluding liquor from the Indian country, and as a consequence the fur trade was characterized during all these years by the crime of smuggling with every incident of fraud and trickery known to that business. It is doubtful if the actual quantity of liquor imported was sensibly diminished by the prohibition while its effects were aggravated by the clandestine methods which the traders were forced to employ. The American Fur Company was pushed to the severest straits of all, for its great prominence made it more open to detection. At one time it undertook to evade the law by manufacturing liquor in the Indian country. This episode, which created a great sensation at the time, will be considered in another place; and instances will be cited to show how shrewd the company's traders became in getting their wares past the government inspectors stationed along the river. There were two occasions in particular when the pressure upon the American Fur Company was very great, and when the use of liquor was deemed by its agents absolutely essential to its continuance in the country. The first of these was in 1833 and 1834, just after the prohibitory law was passed, and when the company was threatened with the powerful opposition of Sublette and Campbell. The other was ten years later, when it was again threatened by a formidable opposition — the firm of Fox, Livingston and Company of New York. During all the intermediate period, however, there were constant demands by the agents of the company in the field for more liquor,⁴ and regular replies

⁴The imperious character of these demands is well illustrated in the following letter from Honoré Picotte at Fort Pierre to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., dated January 4, 1843:

"In one thing they [Fox, Livingston and Company] have the advan-

from St. Louis, warning the agents of the perils involved in sending any.

The house in St. Louis nevertheless made every effort to meet the pressing demands of its agents, and generally succeeded, not infrequently, it is suspected, by the connivance of the authorities — at least the following instructions from Mr. Chouteau to Mr. Picotte would imply as much: "The quantity of A——sent," he wrote March 31, 1840. "is somewhat short of what was asked for, but we think sufficient. In regard to this article, it has been highly necessary that every possible care be taken, both to prevent its abuse and to lessen the quantity distributed. Information respecting this matter has already reached the Department of the Attorney General, and if our Mr. Sanford had not been at Washington this winter most opportunely, we should unquestionably have been prevented from sending any at all this season. You will therefore perceive the necessity of

tage and that is liquor. We know to a certainty that they have five barrels of alcohol at Cedar Island, seventeen at Fort Union [Fort Mortimer near Fort Union], seven of which were taken up by the steamboat New Haven last fall from Fort George, and three at Fort Clark. Mr. Laidlaw writes me that he has no doubt they will open their liquor as soon as the trade commences, and he says that he has not wherewith to oppose them in that article. If, during the winter, they sell but part of their liquor, they will next year send the remainder to Fort McKenzie. By that time we will not have a single drop in the country. With their liquor on one side and the Hudson Bay Company's on the other we are sure to lose the trade of that part next season. Pratte and Cabanne have twelve kegs *en cache* at the head of the Cheyenne which they will trade in the spring if they are not closely watched, and every day some one comes over from the St. Peter's [river in Minnesota] with that article, not in great quantity, it is true, but enough to injure the trade. Under these circumstances you see plainly that we must lose the Blackfeet and Assiniboine trade next year *unless we have liquor*. I therefore request you to use all your influence to send us some of that article next year, say four or five hundred gallons in canteens, kegs, even in bottles, if in no other way. It will require that quantity to compete with Cutting [agent of Fox, Livingston and Company]. Perhaps Mr. Chouteau can get a permit. I will bind myself [!] not to make use of it among the Sioux, Rees, Gros Ventres [Minnetarees], or Mandans. At all events *we must have it.*"

some amendment in this matter, and we trust that you will not fail to use every vigilance to effect it."

The extracts which have been given here from the unpublished records of the times exhibit in a clear light the deplorable effects of the liquor traffic in those early years, not only upon the business of the fur trade, but upon the native tribes as well. They show that, while the government steadfastly maintained on its statute books a regulation designed to protect the Indian, it was never able to carry it into effect. They afford another proof, if one were necessary, of the truth that the mere embodiment of a moral purpose in legislation, regardless of its bearing upon the practical affairs of life, is no guarantee of its successful accomplishment. Finally they furnish an early illustration of the modern aphorism that "Prohibition does not prohibit."

CHAPTER V.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE FUR TRADE.

Means of transportation—The keelboat—The steamboat—The canoe—The mackinaw boat—The bull-boat—Steamboat voyages—The caravan—The rendezvous—The express—The cache—“Fall” and “spring” hunts.

ST. LOUIS, the principal mart and outfitting point for the fur trade, was from one to two thousand miles distant from the best hunting grounds. The matter of transportation to and from regions so remote was, it will readily be understood, one of very great importance. All that portion of the traffic, by far the larger part of the whole, which was confined to the immediate valley of the Missouri, was carried in river craft, mostly in steamboats or keelboats. In downstream navigation use was made of mackinaws, bull-boats or canoes, which were borne along by the current with but slight assistance from the oars. The interior expeditions to the valleys of the Great Salt Lake and Green river were at first conducted by pack trains, but later largely with wagons. The later Santa Fe trade was carried on principally with wagons.

THE KEELBOAT.

The early commerce of the Missouri was always romantic and interesting and not infrequently full of peril.¹ The keelboat, the historic predecessor of the steamboat, was extensively used down to 1830, and did not disappear from the river for several years thereafter. It was a boat of no

¹ For a description of the Missouri river and its tributaries, and a consideration of the origin and application of the name “Missouri,” see Part V., Chapter III.

mean dimensions, averaging from sixty to seventy-five feet long, fifteen to eighteen feet beam, and three to four feet depth of hold. It was built on a regular model, with a keel running from bow to stern, whence its name. Rising from the deck some four or five feet was the cargo box, cut off at each end about twelve feet shorter than the boat. This part of the boat, as the name implies, was generally used for freight, but was occasionally fitted up with staterooms when used for passengers only. The boat was built on thorough principles of ship craft, and was a strong, substantial vessel.

The means of propulsion were various, and were intended to utilize all the forces which man and nature rendered available. The cordelle was the main reliance — a long line attached to the top of a high mast, which stood a little forward of the center of the boat. It passed through a ring, which was fastened by a short line to the bow to help guide the boat, and was drawn by from twenty to forty men strung along the shore. The reason for attaching it to the mast was that it might swing clear of the brush on the bank.

It often happened at river crossings and elsewhere that the cordelle could not be used, and in such cases poles had to be resorted to. These were of various lengths suited to convenient handling, and were equipped with balls or knobs at the upper ends to rest in the hollow of the shoulder. To propel the boat by means of these poles the voyageurs were ranged in single file on each side of the deck near the bow, facing aft. Planting their poles on the river bottom, pointing down stream, they pushed steadily against them, at the same time walking towards the stern along the *passé avant*, a narrow walk some fifteen inches wide on each side of the cargo box, while the boat, yielding to their pressure, moved ahead.

It now and then happened that deep water was found in places where neither pole nor cordelle could be used. Oars were then resorted to, of which there were five or six on each side of the bow.

A very important aid, strange as it may seem, considering the character of a stream like the Missouri, was the sail. It was at times of great assistance, and even sufficient of itself to propel the boat against the current.

Thus by one means or another, and now and then by all together, the early keelboat worked and worried its way up the turbulent current of the Missouri. The best known record for a long journey, say a thousand miles, was eighteen miles per day, while the average was scarcely more than twelve or fifteen. There are several records where keelboats were extensively used for transporting troops, and one in which propeller wheels were provided to be manipulated through hand power by the soldiers. Whatever the method of propulsion, however, the task was always extremely laborious, and the large force and attendant expense required were one of the great arguments for trying the experiment, then considered a very doubtful one on the Missouri, of introducing the steamboat.

THE CANOE.

The wooden canoe, dug out from the trunk of the cottonwood, and hence often called a "dugout," was a very useful craft. Many a journey was made in these crude boats, from the heart of the wilderness two thousand miles away to St. Louis. They were extensively used for local traffic in the neighborhood of the posts.

THE MACKINAW.

The mackinaw was a flat-bottomed boat pointed at both ends, sometimes forty to fifty feet long with twelve feet beam, and three to four feet depth of hold. The oarsmen, four in number, were bestowed in the bow, and the steersman on a high perch in the stern, while the cargo was piled up in the space between them. The current was the main reliance for propulsion. The cargo was about fifteen tons, the rate of progress seventy-five to one hundred miles per day, and the cost about two dollars per day, or about one

and a half mills per mile-ton. The boats were cheaply made, and were intended only for downstream navigation, being abandoned at St. Louis. They were the cheapest of all methods for carrying freight down the river.

THE BULL-BOAT.

The bull-boat was made of buffalo skins sewn together and stretched over a frame of willow and cottonwood poles. The size was commonly about twelve by thirty feet and twenty inches deep. It had the least draught of any river craft, and was therefore best adapted to such shallow streams as the Platte. The cargo generally consisted of robes, and amounted to two and a half tons weight, which caused a draught of only about four inches. These boats, in one form or another, saw extensive service on Western rivers.

THE STEAMBOAT.

It has seldom happened in history that the introduction of labor-saving devices has not robbed society to some extent of what was poetic and sentimental, and replaced it by something more prosaic and matter of fact. The Missouri river steamboat was an exception, for with all the romance that attached to the old keelboat, its own history was more romantic still. The sight of one of these noble vessels, standing high above the water line and well above the highest banks, its white form sharply outlined against the foliage of the bottoms, its lofty chimneys pouring out clouds of smoke, its apparent ease in stemming the swift current, and finally, its strange and supernatural appearance to the rude inhabitants of the prairies, gave it a character distinctly its own. It was found to accomplish a great saving over the cost of the keelboat, and it consequently came rapidly into use, at first in the fur trade, and later in every kind of business, public or private, that was transacted along the river. No feature of frontier life is more intimately blended with the history of the Western country than the Missouri river steamboat.

It was an attractive looking craft. Unlike the ocean vessel, which is in large part below the water line, the river boat drew only three or four feet, and was therefore almost entirely above the surface, giving it an apparent size relatively much greater than that of the ocean vessel. The boats were flat bottomed, and were formerly propelled with side wheels, but later with one wheel in the stern. The freight storage was in the hold, but everything else — boilers, engine, cabins and all — was above the main deck. Suitable appliances were placed on the forecastle for handling freight, while powerful capstans, lines and spars were provided to help over the shallow places.

The handling of these boats was a science in itself, and the Missouri river pilot had a more difficult rôle to fill than ever fell to a navigator on the high seas. Not even the perils of Mississippi river navigation, now permanently fixed in literature through the genius of Mark Twain, were to be compared with those of its great western tributary.

The annual voyages of the steamboats were great events, both at St. Louis and the various posts. The boat carried the necessary outfit for a year's trade, and generally also a hundred or more people for service in the Indian country. Besides the regular crew of the boats, there were engagés to recruit the force in the field or to replace those whose terms were about to expire. There were generally a partner and one or more clerks returning from a visit to St. Louis. More than likely there were several missionaries aboard, while the cabin lists frequently included gentlemen of science or leisure, who made the trip in the interests of their researches, or on account of their love of adventure. Finally there were never lacking the copper countenances of the native inhabitants, who were always sending deputations to St. Louis for one purpose or another. The crew and passengers made up a motley assemblage, the like of which, for picturesque variety, was probably never beheld except in a Missouri river steamboat.

Without following the long monotonous career of the boat, through the innumerable difficulties of its long journey, it will here suffice to note the beginning and end of the voyage. The departure of the boat from St. Louis was naturally an event of much importance. Those who were going to service in the wilderness would be absent several years, while even those who were to return had perils enough before them to make their absence a matter of anxiety to friends. With most of the common passengers, and particularly with the engagés, the parting was anything but a scene of sorrow. The previous days and nights were given over to general carousal and dissipation, with the result that when the hour of sailing arrived, a goodly number were unable to walk aboard the boat, and were either carried on or left altogether. It occasionally happened that those so left would recover in time to hie across the country to St. Charles before the steamboat passed that point.

As the boat pulled out into the stream, those on board opened a running salute of musketry, accompanied by such other accessories as were at hand, and the uproar continued until the boat was practically out of hearing. The exuberant spirits of the crew then settled down to the serious task of reducing things to order. This was a most important proceeding, for ordinarily on leaving port the deck of the boat presented a scene of inextricable confusion, with packages of all descriptions strewn about and passengers not yet assigned to their quarters. The engagés were first given their allowance of blankets and other equipments, and then work was begun at storing away the cargo. Order began gradually to rise from the general chaos, and before nightfall the vessel had taken on the appearance which it would continue to wear during the rest of the trip.

Thus the long voyage through the prairies was begun. Week after week passed as the boat toiled up the river, stopping at the various posts, until finally the scene shifted to the most remote establishment which it was expected to visit. The dreary routine of the trader's life suddenly changed to

unwonted activity. The long-looked-for annual boat was in sight — the great event of the year — with news from the outside world, and all the business matters that made up the purpose of the journey. The fort manned its guns — for it had several small cannon mounted in the bastions — and a hearty salute of welcome was fired. The boat vigorously responded. Everybody about the fort crowded to the scene — the bourgeois for whom a respectful space was made in the crowd, and the clerks, artisans, storekeepers, groups of free trappers, and bands of Indians, forming in all as wild and motley a crowd as boat ever met in port.

Immediately upon landing, and even before the interchange of salutations was complete, the unloading of the cargo was begun. No time was to be lost in navigating the Missouri. Should the spring rise go down before the return of the boat, she would have to stay up all the year, as happened with the steamer *Assiniboine* in 1834-35. Night and day the roustabouts of the boat and the engagés of the fort were busy carrying off the goods and carrying on the furs. A banquet on the boat and another with the bourgeois completed the festivities, and almost before the denizens of the fort had taken their eyes from the strange visitor, she had hauled in her lines and was speeding back to St. Louis. The crowd of passengers was not so large as on the ascending voyage, although there was still a goodly list, comprised mostly of those whose terms of service had expired, of partners in the business, whom the affairs of the concern called to St. Louis, and of the travelers who went up for the trip.

THE CARAVAN.

The caravans² which followed the land route to the mountains or to Santa Fe were, of course, a very different sort of organization from the steamboat and its crew — as

² This term was not often used with reference to the Rocky Mountain expeditions, although entirely applicable to them. Its more common occurrence was in the Santa Fe trade. The British companies called their supply parties from the east *brigades*, a term which was occasionally used in the earlier years of the American trade, but which quickly fell into disuse.

different as was the rendezvous at their destination from the trading post on the river. They generally made their starting point at Independence, Mo. In the earlier years pack trains were exclusively used; later wagons were resorted to for a part of the distance. Mules were used as pack animals, and experts in the art of packing disposed the unwieldy cargoes with marvelous skill upon the unwilling beasts. The caravans moved fifteen to twenty-five miles per day, and camped at the end of each day's journey wherever good grass, wood, and water were to be found. Great caution was always taken to guard against Indian attacks.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

After about a month's wanderings, the caravan arrived at the annual rendezvous in some valley, where it had been arranged the previous year that the mountain parties should meet at a particular date. Hither from all directions came the roving population of the surrounding country. First there were the bands of trappers who were in the regular employ of the companies, and who had passed a long and lonesome winter among the mountains. Then there were the freemen, who gathered with the rest to dispose of the fruits of their labors. To the same spot came numerous bands of Indians also with furs or horses to sell.

As soon as everyone expected had arrived, the business began. The parties belonging to the company turned over their furs, and received their wages and a new equipment. The free trappers and the Indians trafficked their furs on the best attainable terms, and purchased their equipments for the ensuing year. While all this business was going on, and while the cargoes were being made ready for the homeward journey, the heterogeneous assemblage went in for a good time. The flat alcohol kegs were broached, liquor flowed like water, and the wildest tumult at length ensued, ending not infrequently with fatal results. The debauch extended likewise to the Indians, many of whom were presently reduced to a state of the most abhorrent and

revolting intoxication. Gambling was actively rushed during the whole time, and few were the trappers who did not pay a heavy tribute upon the altar of chance. In fact, with gaming, treating, and feasting, most of the hard earnings of a year's toil found their way directly back into the pockets of the company at the enormous profit which their prices secured. The caravan then returned to the States, and the sore-headed trappers, after recovering from their dissipation, betook themselves with heavy hearts but light pockets to their lonely retreats in the mountains, there to pass another three hundred and sixty days in peril and toil, that they might spend five in drunken frolic.

The mountain rendezvous was a remarkable gathering, entirely unique in American history. Few finer subjects for a great painting could be found than one of these assemblages as they used to take place in the upper valley of the Green river under the Wind river mountains, or in Pierre's Hole under the Three Tetons. The rendezvous, as it was in its best days, was a very transient institution, continuing at most for only about a decade. But its brief career was full of thrilling incidents.

PACKS.

In transporting the furs to market, they were disposed in packs weighing about one hundred pounds.³ They were very securely packed and so wrapped as to protect them from the weather. It was a costly and perilous undertaking to move the heavy cargoes that were obtained at these rendezvous on their long journey to St. Louis, and it is said that General Ashley once offered a dollar a pound to any one who would insure him against loss during the transportation.

A common unit of price in the earlier years of the trade was a first-class beaver skin, worth in the neighborhood of six dollars. It was called a *plus*, and was much used at that time.

³ A pack of furs contained ten buffalo robes, fourteen bear, sixty otter, eighty beaver, eighty raccoon, one hundred and twenty foxes, or six hundred muskrat skins.

THE EXPRESS.

Along the Missouri valley communication by express was had at intervals throughout the year with St. Louis. Such was the case occasionally from the mountains. The express down the valley was generally by canoe, except in winter, when dog trains were used above Council Bluffs, and saddle horses below. The upbound express was always overland above Council Bluffs. The express was an important matter. It gave the officials at St. Louis news from their remote establishments, brought down the requisitions from the various posts for the next year's supplies, and reported the state of the winter, the approximate depth of snow in the mountains, and the probable time of its melting, whereby the company was able to plan its annual voyage with at least a shadow of relation to the condition of high water in the river. The express from St. Louis likewise contained the important correspondence relative to the business.

THE CACHE.

Of the many terms peculiar to the fur trade no one was of more common use than the word *cache*. It frequently happened that parties had to abandon temporarily the property they were carrying, with the intention of returning for it at a more convenient time. The property so abandoned was cached or concealed so as to prevent its loss or injury. The use of the word in this specific meaning is very old and of course came through the French to whose language it belongs. The cache, as ordinarily prepared, consisted of a deep pit in the ground in the construction of which the point of paramount importance was to avoid any trace of the work which might attract attention after it was completed. The size of the pit depended upon the quantity it was to hold, and sometimes it was very spacious and contained wagons and other bulky material. The best site was in a dry soil, easily excavated and in a situation that afforded good facilities for concealment. The pit was lined with sticks and dry leaves after which the goods were carefully

disposed therein, and all perishable articles, such as provisions or fur, were protected with the utmost care. This was a vital matter for it frequently happened that valuable articles were found spoiled.

The greatest difficulty in the preparation of a cache was its concealment after completion. From the sharp eyes of the sons of the prairies no trace however minute would escape. They might be peering over some neighboring precipice as were the Crows when the returning Astorians were making a cache on the shores of Snake river in 1812. The concealment consisted simply in removing all evidence of the cache — never by any sort of covering. The point was to leave the ground looking just as it did before. If in turf, the sod was scrupulously replaced. In other places it was usual to build a camp fire over the cache and thus not only obliterate all evidence of the work but divert attention as well.

With all this care caches were often discovered and “raised” or “lifted” by those who had no right to them. Wolves often dug them out and their work would discover them to the Indians. The trappers themselves, as a general thing, respected the caches of rival parties.

Caches were occasionally made in the sides of vertical cliffs. Such a bank in the Wind River valley once caved in while work was going on and killed two men. They were also made in the trunks of trees, in clefts of rocks and other places, but nearly always in the ground.

These caches sometimes attained notoriety and have left their names in various localities. Cache valley, Utah, is an example, as were the “caches” on the Arkansas river. There are also numerous “Cache creeks” scattered throughout the West.

THE SPRING AND FALL HUNTS.

Few terms are more familiar in the nomenclature of the fur trade than *spring* and *fall hunts*. Most of the beaver fur was taken in these two seasons. In the summer

the fur was not in good condition, and the trapper improved this period of enforced inactivity to visit the annual rendezvous or some trading post, to settle his accounts for the year, to secure a new equipment, and to return to the theater of his approaching fall hunt. In the winter the climate was too severe for work, the peril of travel was extreme, the streams were frozen over, and the beaver was hibernating in his lodge. The trapper again made a virtue of necessity, selected some safe and sheltered retreat, and whiled away the long and lonely winters as best he could.

The severity of the winter seemed to add quality to the fur, and skins taken in the spring hunts were better than those taken in the fall.

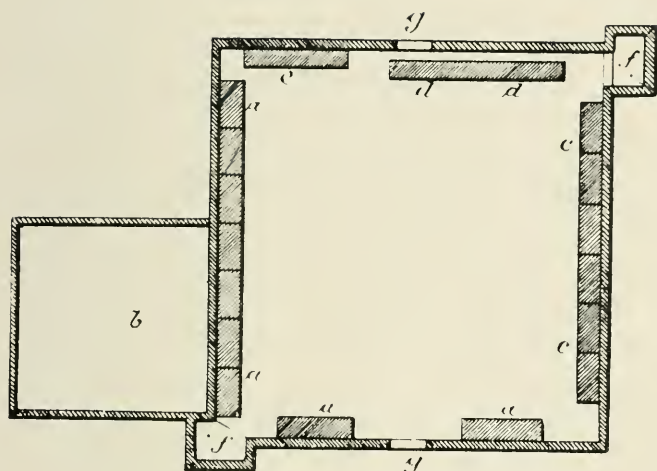
CHAPTER VI.

TRADING POSTS.

Great number of trading posts—Description of a typical trading post—Defensive features—Interior arrangements—The chantier—Smaller posts—Life at the trading posts—Arrival of the annual convoy—Journals of the posts—Geographical distribution.

TO one who has never given the subject especial attention, the large number of establishments, dignified with the name of *forts*, *posts*, or *houses*, that existed in the heart of the wilderness long before the tide of western emigration had set in, would seem almost incredible. In 1843 there were in existence in the country tributary to St. Louis no fewer than one hundred and fifty occupied or abandoned posts. The names of more than one hundred have been recovered while the casual hints thrown out in the narratives and correspondence of the times make certain the existence of a much larger number. Some of these were really great establishments and lasted many years; others were very temporary affairs, being occupied only for a season or two. Abandoned sites were frequently reoccupied, often by different companies who christened them with new names.

By far the greater number of these posts lay along the Missouri river, and a glance at our map will show a crowding of names which even modern settlement scarcely equals. Most of the names have long been buried in oblivion, and are here resurrected as from the tomb of history. Many are permanently lost, while others can not be cleared of uncertainty as to their true location and ownership. Many of the names are perpetuated in towns and villages which have grown up on or near the old sites. Others, that should



GROUND PLAN OF A TYPICAL TRADING POST

(Fort Pierre)

From a drawing by Maximilian

ff. Two-story block-houses. Upper story adapted for use of small arms; lower story for cannon.

gg. Front and back of quadrangle 114 paces in length; other sides 108 paces; inner area 87 by 87 paces.

dd. One-story residence of bourgeois of post.

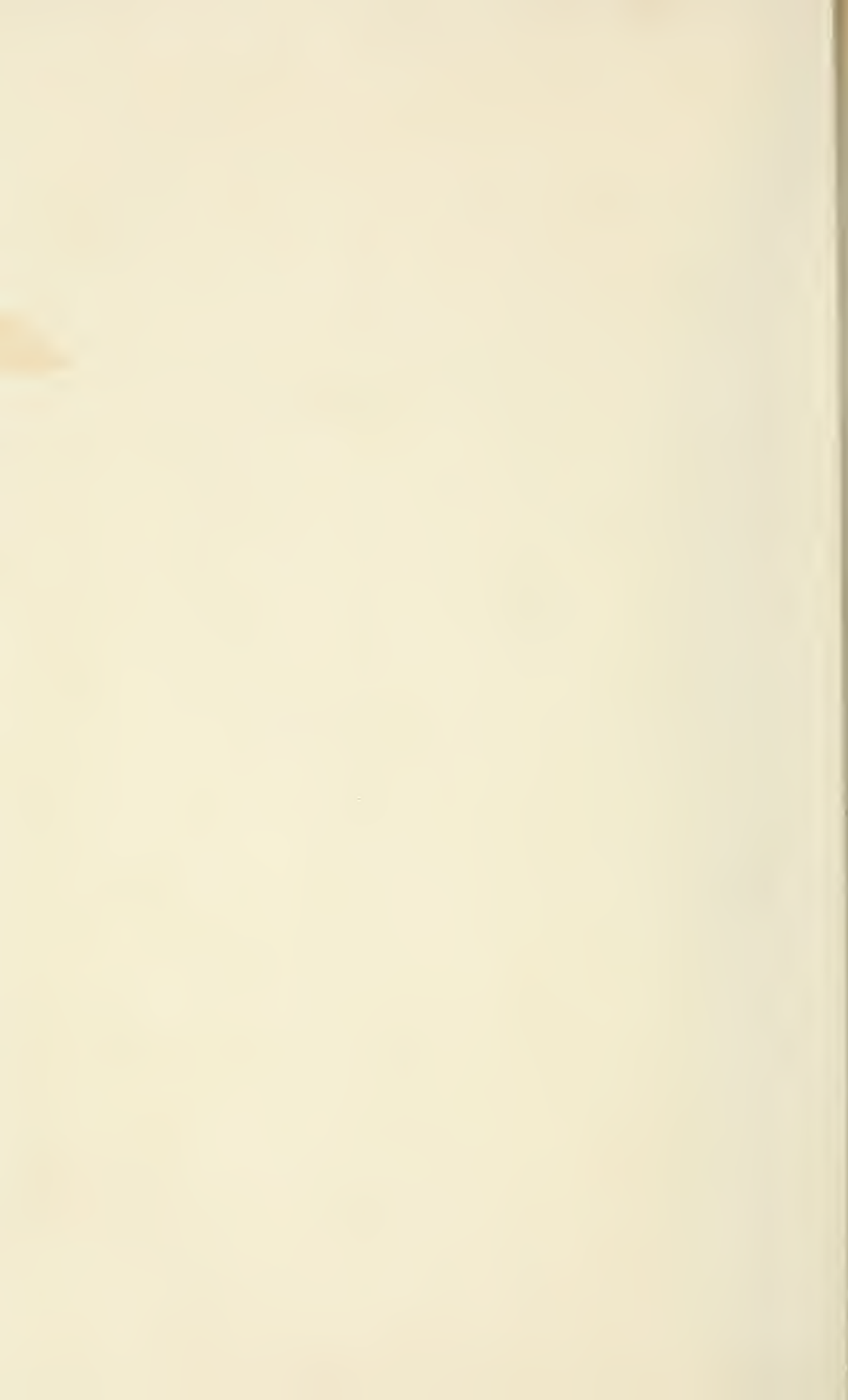
e. Office and residence of clerk.

aaaa. Residence of other clerks, interpreter, engagés, and their families.

cc. Stores.

gg. Entrance doors to fort.

b. Garden.



have survived on account of their great importance, have passed entirely out of use.

These establishments were generally designated as "Forts." Their primary purpose was trade, but in a land of savage and treacherous inhabitants they served the purpose of protection as well. Their construction was therefore adapted to both ends. The ground plan of the typical trading post was always a rectangle, sometimes square, but generally a little longer in one direction than the other. The sides varied in length from one to four hundred feet depending upon the magnitude of the trade which the post must accommodate. In order to ensure the necessary protection the fort was enclosed with strong walls of wood or adobe. There were a few posts built of adobe, but these were the exception. The typical fort was protected by wooden palisades or pickets varying from twelve to eighteen feet high and from four to eight inches thick. In some instances the pickets were squared and set in juxtaposition; in others they were half round pieces formed by sawing logs in halves. They were set from two to three feet in the ground and the earth was generally banked up to a small height against them. In some forts there were musketry loopholes along the top of this embankment. For the purposes of guard duty and also for active defense a plank walk was bracketed to the inside of the pickets about four feet below the top so that sentinels could walk there and observe the ground outside. In case of attack the defenders could mount this walk and fire over the palisades or through the loopholes provided for the purpose.

The main reliance for defense consisted of two bastions, or blockhouses, as they were commonly called, placed at diagonally opposite corners of the fort. They were square in plan, fifteen to eighteen feet on a side, with two stories, and were generally covered with a roof. The lower floor was a few feet above the level of the ground and was loopholed for the small cannon which all the more important posts possessed. Above the artillery floor was another

for the musketry defense with about three loopholes on each exposed face. The blockhouse stood entirely outside the main enclosure, its inner corner joining the corner of the fort so that it flanked two sides; that is, the defenders in each bastion could fire along the outer face of two sides of the fort and thus prevent any attempt to scale or demolish the walls.

A "fort" thus constructed was really very strong and was practically impregnable to an enemy without artillery. A host of savages armed with bows and arrows or with the indifferent firearms of those days could make no impression upon it, and the garrison could look with indifference upon any attack, however formidable, so long as they used reasonable precaution and were supplied with provisions and ammunition. There is no record of a successful siege of a stockaded fort in the entire history of the fur trade west of the Mississippi.

The necessary prerequisite of defense having been satisfied, the other arrangements of the fort related to the purposes of trade. The entrance was through a strong and heavy door provided with a wicket through which the door-keeper could examine a person applying for admittance. In the more elaborate posts there was a double door, with a room and a trading counter between them. The Indians were admitted only to this space for purposes of trade. In the single-door posts trading was sometimes conducted through the wicket when there was suspicion of danger.

On the opposite side of the enclosure from the entrance stood the house of the bourgeois, usually the most pretentious building in the post. Nearby stood the office and the house of the clerks. Along one side of the quadrangle stood the barracks of the engagés while across the square were the store houses for the merchandise, provisions, furs, and peltries. There were also buildings for shops, of which the blacksmith shop was most important. A fur press was a necessary part of the establishment. The buildings usually stood with their back walls on the line of the

enclosure and for the distance covered by them they sometimes replaced the pickets. In the center of the enclosure was a large square or court in which ordinarily stood a piece of artillery trained upon the entrance, and a flag staff from which the ensign of the republic daily floated to the prairie breeze.

Close to the fort, and itself protected by a strong enclosure, with a communication through the walls of the fort, there was often to be found a small field in which common vegetables were raised for the garrison. Then there was always some protection for the horses which were the great object of the Indian forays. Sometimes the corral was outside and close to the fort; but in many cases the stock was brought within the walls. On the plains around the post there was scarcely ever absent the characteristic tent of the Indian, and at certain seasons they were scattered by hundreds in every direction.

Near most of the larger river posts there was some spot selected where timber was abundant at which the pickets and lumber for the posts were manufactured, the mackinaw boats and the canoes built, and such other work done as the establishment required. These places were called *chantiers*, the French for shipyard, and the name has survived in one or two places, as at Chantier creek in South Dakota and Shonkin creek, which was first called Chantier creek, a little below Fort Benton in Montana. The Fort Pierre chantier was commonly called the Navy Yard and was twenty miles or so above the post.

The description above given applies only to the larger posts. There were besides a great number of smaller posts, which were intended for temporary occupancy only and were accordingly of a much less pretentious character. In many cases the resources of the traders did not permit of anything except the most primitive structures. Generally these posts or houses were simply log buildings, perhaps two or three huddled together, but often only one. They were scattered all over the West and the names and localities of most of them have been forgotten.

In the upper Missouri country the smaller posts were not independent establishments but were connected with some larger post from which they received supplies, equipment, and men and to which they sent the produce of their trade. Union and Pierre are the most prominent examples of the larger posts, to each of which there were connected a number of smaller establishments.

Life at these trading posts, buried as they were in the depths of the wilderness, a thousand miles, often, from civilization, could not but be dull, uninteresting, and lonely, for the greater part of the year. Few indeed were the diversions that came to enliven the humdrum life of the garrison, yet occasionally there were excitement and hilarity to spare. For the most part the steady routine of work kept up day by day — receiving and dismissing bands of Indians who came in to trade, watching the country for signs of buffalo and when they came sending parties out to hunt them, preparing and dispatching the winter express to St. Louis, cutting wood for the annual steamboat at such posts as were on the river, keeping the account books, journals, and correspondence of the posts, receiving returns from subordinate houses, and baling and pressing furs for St. Louis. Once or twice a year bundles of newspapers arrived from the outer world and these were read and re-read until worn out by the handling. Occasionally distinguished visitors passed weeks or months at the post, thus adding a new and interesting element to its life. Hunting was the one great amusement and in this the buffalo chase stood supreme. There was of course a variety of games and the Fort Pierre journal occasionally mentions them in its records. The arrival of bands of free trappers was always signaled by a season of debauch in which the astute trader got not only all the furs, but generally all the money he had paid for them. As there were competing establishments at most of the important situations a degree of social intercourse was kept up between them. There were “calls” and “dinners” back and forth, for the exigencies of competition were never

permitted to interfere with those amenities which are naturally observed between man and man.

The most notable event in the life of the trading post was the arrival of the annual convoy from the States, whether the steamboat or keelboat on the Missouri, the brigade in the mountains, or the caravan on the plains. This was the time when the business of the past year was closed up and a new year begun. Engagés whose terms of service had expired might now return home while others came to take their places. The convoy brought merchandise for the next year's trade, packages and letters from friends, and papers from the outside world. It took back the cargoes of furs and peltries gathered during the year and such of the force whose terms of service had expired and who did not wish to remain longer. The arrival of the Missouri steamboat in particular was an event looked forward to with the most eager interest. When the time had come to expect it Indian runners were dispatched down the river a hundred miles or so to bring the first news of her approach. Then the bourgeois and his clerk would sometimes set out in a canoe and meet the boat on her way. When the lofty smoke stacks burst into sight from behind the last bluff which excluded her from view, the fort let go, in joyful salute, such artillery as it possessed, while the whole population — traders, engagés, and Indians — went down to the bank to bid welcome to the visitor.

At the more important posts a daily journal of events was regularly kept. Fragments of those at Forts Pierre, Clark, and Union have been preserved and give us an inside view of the kind of life that was led there.¹

In the matter of geographical distribution the controlling factor in the location of the posts was the convenience of the Indians. Not infrequently the tribes arbitrarily designated the spots where the posts should be built. The geography of the country exercised an important influence on the commercial value of any situation. The post at the

¹ See Appendix F.

mouth of the Yellowstone, for example, commanded the commerce of two great rivers and became a most important establishment. So throughout the West in all those situations like the mouth of the Yellowstone, the mouth of the Laramie, the heart of the Blackfoot, Sioux, and Mandan countries, the headwaters of the Arkansas and South Platte, where the advantages for trade were greatest, the trading post arose. In general there were two or three such posts belonging to different companies.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAPPING FRATERNITY.

The Bourgeois or Partisan — The hunter and trapper — Camp keepers — Free trappers — The voyageur — The American hunter — Artisans — *Mangeurs de lard* — Habits of thrift — Physiognomy — Dress — Shelter — Wages — Desertion — Language — Lack of interest in geology, etc.

UNDER this title will be considered the wandering population of the Western country who entered it upon its discovery for purposes of trade and adventure, and who for many years were the sole representatives of white occupancy. Their life was peculiar and forms a distinct and unique phase in the growth of American communities. It was the first phase of this growth, for it was the trader, the trapper, and the hunter who paved the way for the settlement and development that were to follow.

It would scarcely be possible to propose any distinct type as characteristic of the trapping fraternity. In the first place there were three separate nationalities, American, French and Spanish, who carried into the life of the West their peculiar national traits quite independently of the particular work in which they were engaged. Then there was a wide variety of occupation in the business of the fur trade and the individual who filled one rôle might be a very different sort of man from him who filled another. It is therefore necessary to consider the various features of this early business in order to understand what manner of man was particularly suited to each.

THE BOURGEOIS AND THE PARTISAN.

By these terms were usually designated those who had

charge of the trading posts and field expeditions of the various companies. The bourgeois was the manager of the trading post, while the partisan was the leader of the expedition, for it will be borne in mind that there were two distinct methods of conducting the fur business, one at permanent posts and the other at temporary rendezvous. The bourgeois had absolute authority at his post, and conducted his business with an almost military discipline. He usually dined either alone or with a few only of the leading subordinates. The distinction of rank was strictly drawn and the common *mangeur de lard* would no sooner presume unbidden to hold social intercourse with his bourgeois than would a soldier with his regimental commander. In some of the posts in the early days the bourgeois wore a kind of uniform. This was particularly true of that considerable leaven which came into the American fur trade through the Columbia Fur Company. McKenzie at Fort Union wore uniform and so for a time did Laidlaw at Pierre.

The bourgeois was nearly always a partner in the company. He was director in chief of all the business at the particular post of which he was in charge and controlled the policy of trade with the Indians who belonged geographically to it. He organized parties of trappers to work up particular streams, and sent individual traders to such tribes as he thought necessary. He employed hunters to keep the post supplied with fresh meat and he directed to what extent gardening should be carried on, or other means be adopted to provide subsistence at his own and the outlying posts. He selected certain subordinates to conduct the trade with visiting Indians, others to care for and pack the furs for shipment, while he attended to the correspondence with the company at St. Louis or with his lieutenants at detached stations.

His duties were of the most comprehensive nature and it required a man of great administrative ability to manage them. And so we find that the bourgeois at such posts as Pierre and Union or Bent's Fort on the Arkansas were men

of a high order of ability. Kenneth McKenzie, William Laidlaw, Alexander Culbertson, William Bent, and others were fit men to command armies, manage great railroads, or fill any high calling to which the fortune of life might have led them. No commander of a military post on the frontier ever carried a greater responsibility than did these important bourgeois, whose authority covered a vast stretch of territory where the rule of law did not reach and where they had to deal continually with restless adventurers and savage men.

What was true of the bourgeois of the great posts was equally true of the partisan or leader of the itinerant expeditions. The nature of their business was somewhat different, but the qualities of success were the same and one may find the counterparts of the McKenzies and Culbertsons of the trading posts in the Ashleys, Smiths, and Sublettes of the mountains.

CLERK.

Next in importance to the bourgeois was the clerk, whose duties placed him first in line of promotion. He was entitled to the same social rank as the bourgeois, and in the latter's absence succeeded to his duties. He was frequently in command of posts, and his work on the whole was the most exacting of any that pertained to the trade. He was often required to take an outfit of merchandise and proceed to some Indian village, there to reside in the lodge of a chief until the trade of the band had been exhausted.

There were usually several clerks at the more important posts. The most trusted of them were frequently stockholders or partners in the companies for which they were working, but ordinarily they were only salaried employes.

THE HUNTER AND TRAPPER.¹

The hunters and trappers can hardly be said to have constituted a distinct class, for they were men who could

¹The term "mountaineer" was extensively used in describing the personnel of the mountain expeditions.

turn their hand to almost any work that fell in their way. There were, indeed, in every expedition skilled hunters whose duty it was to beat up the country along the route and provide meat for the party, and there were also men who followed the streams exclusively and spent their lives trapping beaver; but in general the hunter was a versatile genius who adapted himself to whatever duty presented itself.

When it was desired to work up a section of country by trapping its streams, it was the usual practice for the larger parties to break up into small groups, each group taking a particular stream or locality. In this way lone bands would penetrate to the most obscure and inaccessible retreats of the mountains and remain perhaps weeks or months without seeing another individual than their own party. It was not often, however, that the resources of a stream took long to exhaust them and the parties usually reappeared after a few days, ready to take up another stream or join the main party in a move to a different locality. Frequently the danger from the Indians forbade separation into small groups and the whole party had to keep together.

The life of these lonely hermits of the mountains, like the solitary sheepherder of today, seems unendurable to one who is fond of social intercourse, or at least of seeing now and then some one or more of his fellowmen. The habit of seclusion, however, seemed to grow upon the individual and he came to love the life in spite of its solitude, its hardships, and its privations.

CAMP KEEPERS.

Under this designation it is intended to include only those individuals in the trapping expeditions to the mountains whose duty it was to remain in camp and care for the furs which their companions might collect. They skinned the beaver and other animals; cleaned, dressed, and dried the skins, and did whatever other work was required to protect and preserve the fruits of the chase. They also cared for

the stock and attended to other duties of the camp. There was usually one of these camp keepers to about two trappers.

FREE TRAPPERS.

A characteristic class engaged in the fur trade was that of the free hunters or trappers. As the name implies, these people were not bound to service with any company. They had their own individual organization and went when and where they chose. Sometimes there were a number of free trappers together, each independent of the other, capturing and selling his own peltries, but keeping with the rest for self-protection. In other instances the free trapper was a sort of partisan and had his own party bound to him in service. The results of the hunt all went to him, under certain arrangements, and he generally took his furs to the nearest trading post for sale, or even went with them himself to St. Louis.

The free trappers, or freemen, as they were commonly called, were the most interesting and enviable class in the mountains. Bound to no company, free to go where they pleased, they were held in higher repute than any other class. Moreover they were men of bold and adventurous spirit for none other would have the courage to follow so hazardous a business. They were liable, however, to have too much of this spirit, or perhaps better, too much of a ruffian spirit. The leader could not always control them and they were prone to all sorts of excesses. Vain of their appearance, extravagantly fond of ornament for both themselves and their steeds, they rivaled the proud Indian himself in the profusion of gewgaws which decked out their attire. They were likewise utterly improvident, fond of gambling, and of all sorts of trials of skill, and it was a general rule that most of the proceeds of their labor were quickly squandered at the first rendezvous or post which they reached.

THE VOYAGEUR.

As is well known, the French Creole, both of Canada and

Louisiana, was a very important figure in the early fur trade. It is probable that at least four-fifths of the lower grades of employes were of this nationality, and as the differences of habit and temperament between them and the American were marked, it will be of advantage to present a brief comparison of the two.

The voyageur had a light and buoyant vein in his nature which was totally wanting in the American. He was always singing at his work, laughing and joking with his companions, and cheerful and happy in his manner. His willingness to toil, his complacent endurance of the most prodigious labors and his long acquiescence in the most scanty provision for food and shelter made him the cheerful slave of the fur trade. It would have been impossible to have extorted similar service from an American. As a general thing his field of work was more upon the water than upon land, although this was not an exclusive rule. It was he who cordelled the keelboat up the long course of the Missouri and performed the arduous labors connected with the navigation of that most stubborn stream. The canoe or other craft, and not the horse, was therefore his mode of conveyance; the water was his natural element, and the river valleys, rather than the mountains and the plains, were his home.

As a rule the voyageurs were wholly illiterate and very few of them were able to sign their contracts of service. They were not a brave people, and their fears when upon dangerous ground were often ludicrous in the extreme. They were all devout Catholics.

The voyageur was beyond comparison the most interesting and picturesque personality in the trapping fraternity — mild in disposition, mercurial in temper, obedient, willing, and contented, ever ready to undergo the most severe hardship, and altogether a most useful and indispensable character in the business of the fur trader.

The American hunter, on the other hand, lacked the vivacity and happy temperament of the Frenchman. He

was less subservient and compliant under authority. He was more of a "deserter," more independent, talked and sang less, and in outward appearance was a less amiable and agreeable character to get along with. But in dangerous emergencies, in long and arduous undertakings, and in sterling qualities in battle he was far and away above his Gallic brother. If, in service on the rivers, Mr. Astor's estimate was true that one Canadian voyageur was worth three Americans, it was equally true that in the rough life of the wilderness one American hunter was worth three Canadians. Each filled a place which the other could not, and all comparisons should take this fact into consideration lest injustice be done on either side.²

ARTISANS, ETC.

There were always at the larger posts various grades of

² The common verdict of the traders, as well as of travelers, is that the voyageur was very deficient in physical courage. Ashley complained that they utterly failed him at the time of the Aricara fight in 1823. Maximilian, Prince of Wied, records that when passing some dangerous ground, "my Canadians were so timid that they did not venture to speak aloud." They were always terror-stricken in the presence of Indians whose friendship was doubtful.

The Canadian boat songs were a characteristic feature of the voyageur's life. They were usually simple ditties and were a great relief in times of difficult work, when they cheered up the weary company as martial music does the tired soldier. It is to be regretted that more of these songs have not been preserved. The following stanzas illustrate their general quality:

" Dans mon chemin j'ai rencontré
Trois cavalières bien montées,
L'on, ton, laridon danée
L'on, ton, laridon, dai.

" Trois cavalières bien montées,
L'une à cheval, l'autre à pied.
L'on, ton, etc."

The Canadians, despite the scantiness of their allowance of food, were great eaters when they could get what they wanted, and it was a common saw in the fur business that two Canadians would devour off-hand the whole side of a buffalo.

artisans such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and boat builders, who were qualified for any special work which the exigencies of the service might require. With the overland expeditions there were of course the necessary packers, teamsters, and camp followers to do the work of the camp and the march.

MANGEURS DE LARD.

To perform the common labor of the fur trade there were annually imported from Canada numbers of raw recruits who were wholly without experience in the business. They were bound for a period of five years under the most rigorous engagement, and at wages that made it impossible for them to arrive at the end of their term without being in their employers' debt. As there was no way for them to get passage out of the country while so in debt, they were compelled to remain and keep at work or resort to the dangerous expedient of desertion. En route from Canada to their places of work they were fed on pork, hard bread, and pea soup, but principally on pork, from which circumstance they were called *mangeurs de lard*, or pork eaters, by the more experienced voyageurs. From this association the term came to be used in ridicule to denote a greenhorn, tenderfoot, or generally an individual of no experience.³

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAPPING FRATERNITY.

Habits of thrift among the trappers were practically unknown. They were improvident, largely by choice. They spurned the idea of frugality or economy in regard to their earnings, and were therefore always poor. Zenas Leonard,

³ Pierre Chouteau, Jr., in one of his letters characterizes an employe who had made a false step as "*a raw hand*, a new beginner, or in common parlance, a *mangeur de lard*." Father De Smet says that the term was applied by way of pleasantry to anyone who was making his first appearance in the country.

Those who had passed several winters in the Indian country and had gained some experience were often called *hivernans* or *wintercrs*. The common hired hands engaged at St. Louis were generally termed *engagés*.

who passed three years with them, and whose experiences will be related in another part of this work, said: "Scarcely one man in ten of those employed in this country ever thinks of saving a single dollar of his earnings, but all spend it as fast as they can find an object to spend it for. They care not what may come to pass tomorrow, but think only of enjoying the present moment." Nathaniel J. Wyeth said of his own party: "Almost all the men take up [their wages] as fast as they earn — and would faster, if I would let them — in goods at about five hundred per cent on original cost." It was a sort of mountain pride, a convention of the business, to squander wages as fast as earned.

The nature of service in the wilderness produced its effect in the physiognomy, language, habits, and dress of the hunter. The hard life which he was compelled to follow left a deep impression upon his physical appearance. He was ordinarily gaunt and spare, browned with exposure, his hair long and unkempt, while his general make-up, with the queer dress which he wore, made it often difficult to distinguish him from an Indian. The constant peril of his life and the necessity of unremitting vigilance gave him a kind of piercing look, his head slightly bent forward and his deep eyes peering from under a slouch hat, or whatever head-gear he might possess, as if studying the face of the stranger to learn whether friend or foe. On the whole he impressed one as taciturn and gloomy, and his life did to some extent suppress gaiety and tenderness. He became accustomed to scenes of violence and death and the problem of self-preservation was of such paramount importance that he had but little time to waste upon ineffectual reflections. His conversation with his companions, where interspersed with lighter touches, was still of a dry wit order, not much abounding in hearty laugh or relaxed countenance. Such evidences of affection or love for his fellows as he did display were generally couched in language of an opposite character through which his companion would divine his intended meaning. In spite, however, of his apparently

unsocial disposition, he was "generous, even to a fault." So few were his numbers that friendships became deeply rooted. His "possibles" were always at the disposal of his companions, and their word or promise was all the security he wanted.

Partly from inclination and partly from necessity the hunter in his dress adopted the customs of the Indians. The clothes which he brought from the States quickly fell to pieces under the wear and tear of the life in which he was engaged. The Indian costume was the most convenient substitute. There was moreover a manifest pride on the part of the hunter in imitating the garb of his red brethren, and it is doubtful if the fondness of the latter for the incongruous combinations of his own and the white man's clothing was more marked than that of the hunter for the wild attire of the savage. The headdress in summer usually consisted of a light handkerchief, adjusted in the style of a turban so as to be attractive in appearance while serving as a protection against heat and insects. The upper part of the body was clad in a light blue shirt of coarse cotton or other cloth, and in some cases breeches with long deerskin leggings were worn, leaving the thighs and hips bare. "The cloth which was folded around the loins was held in place by the girdle," while a "hunting shirt with a large cape and loose sleeves reached nearly to the knees. . . . It opened in front like a coat and was made so large as to lap at least a foot across the breast. The folds of the bosom served the purpose of a pocket. . . . The moccasin was made of a single piece of heavy dressed buckskin. A plain seam ran from the heel to the ankle, but the upper part, from the toe to the instep, was gathered. The shoe thread was the sinews of deer or of buckskin."

In winter the clothing as just described was materially increased both in quantity and quality. The hunting shirt was made of dressed deerskin. A heavy hooded cloak, called a capote, was thrown over the shoulders. The tops of the moccasins were made with long folds which could

be wrapped around the ankles and the interior was lined with wool or deer hair.

All portions of this picturesque attire, whether for summer or winter use, were ornamented with gay embroidery, fringes, bead work, hair, feathers, and other gewgaws. A belt hung over the left shoulder and under the right arm in which the ammunition for his rifle was carried. In leather bags attached to his girdle were his knife and hatchet and materials for mending his moccasins, while his few remaining equipments were bestowed upon other portions of his body.⁴

While wandering about on his hunting expeditions the mountaineer ordinarily had no shelter but the sky and lay down to sleep in the open air. His bed consisted generally of a single buffalo robe, occasionally with leaves or boughs underneath. His saddle often did service as a pillow, while one or two blankets were his sole protection from the cold. In the winter season, or at other times when his business required a considerable sojourn in one place, he erected a rude hut for his better protection in either hot or cold weather. It was located near some stream where both grass and wood were plenty, and was formed of skins spread over an arched frame-work of saplings bent to a semicircle with their extremities inserted in the ground. His fire was built in front, and near by was a pole laden with the various meats which were his main reliance for food. The "grain-ing blocks" and stretching frame, used in cleaning and curing the skins, stood conveniently at hand. The traps hung on some neighboring tree and perhaps a brace of elk antlers did service as a rack on which to hang his articles of clothing when not in use. The various equipments for his horse were

⁴This description of the hunter's apparel is mainly borrowed and condensed from an article in the *Encyclopedia of St. Louis* (1899). It is the most complete that has fallen under the author's notice, and is from the pen of Prof. Sylvester Waterhouse, of Washington University, St. Louis—a most painstaking investigator, the fruit of whose careful researches has enriched the work of more than one writer upon these themes.

carefully bestowed in some convenient place and the steed himself was probably grazing near by or eating the bark of cottonwood trees felled for the purpose.⁵

The hunter's "possibles" or "fixens," as his equipment and luxuries were called by himself, were very limited, for his manner of life required that he should be as free of impedimenta as possible. His rifle and its appurtenances, his traps, knives, hatchet, a few culinary utensils, his tobacco, and some indispensable articles of food such as coffee, sugar, and salt — these with his bedding and the equipments for his horse constituted the extent of his worldly belongings. He usually had, besides the horse he rode, one or two pack animals to carry his equipments and the furs which he might secure.

The wages paid in the fur trade were very small considering the arduous and dangerous character of the work. Clerks received about five hundred dollars and the engagés about one hundred and fifty dollars a year. With this went a plain subsistence which would instantly be repudiated by a laboring man of today. Often the engagés were required to subsist themselves "*aux aliments du pays*," that is, to get along with such provisions as they or the hunters could extract from the country. They were required, when not otherwise needed, to hunt game, gather wild fruits, cultivate the gardens and do whatever else was necessary to get provisions. If they ever indulged their appetite for sugar or similar luxuries which could be had only from the company's warehouse, they paid for them at a price which quickly absorbed their hard earnings.

The lower class of employes were generally in the company's debt, and this may account in part for the desertions that were always taking place. These were more frequent among the Americans than among the Creoles, but they were common with both. One can form some idea of the severe service required of these engagés when they were

⁵ This description of a winter shelter for the hunter is drawn in part from *Rocky Mountain Life* — Sage, p. 348.

willing, in order to escape from it, to undertake the hazardous experiment of desertion. Often two or three men with a canoe, if on the river, or their horses, if inland, would start for St. Louis, a thousand miles away, through tribes of hostile Indians, always in danger of death or recapture. In spite of the romance of the trapper's life, it had its dark side, a side that would be very dark if placed alongside of the laboring man's condition of today.

The language of the trappers was a strange medley of English, French, and Spanish and as distant from grammatical and literary propriety as it is possible to conceive. As in all situations where men are long associated in the same business and in a measure excluded from contact with the world around them, a peculiar jargon grew up among the trapping fraternity, vigorous, and picturesque, if not choice, in its details, but now entirely extinct. Only in a few old narratives of the times does it still survive with any degree of fidelity.⁶

Here we may properly consider an historic peculiarity of the trapping fraternity which has more than once attracted attention — their utter lack of interest in the geological formations or mineral deposits of the country over which they roamed so extensively. It is indeed a singular fact that a class of men like the American hunters, who shrank at no toil in their search for wealth, should have been so oblivious to whatever lay beneath the surface of the earth. Considering the fascination which the search for gold has had for adventurers in all ages, it is inexplicable that those hardy spirits should have roamed back and forth for half a century or more over those now famous spots where wealth could be had by stooping to pick it up, and should have remained unconscious of its presence. It seems like a providential interposition that thus concealed the knowledge of the mineral riches of the west until all those controversies over the questions of international boundary were perma-

⁶The best of these is *Life in the Far West* by George Frederick Ruxton, London, 1849.

nently settled. For it must be borne in mind that during nearly all of the first half of the present century a large part of the country roamed over by the trapper did not belong to the United States.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS.

Love of wilderness life — Absence of legal restraint — Business methods — Personal relations.

IT was a common observation by travelers in the Far West during the fur-trading era that those who once entered the wild life of the wilderness clung to it afterward as if by an irresistible fascination. It is not difficult to account for this fact, so far as it is actually true. Most men have an element of aboriginal life in their make-up, perhaps the long suppressed characteristic from the times when their ancestors so lived. The advantages of civilization are all purchased at the expense of freedom; and the more profuse and abundant these advantages the more rigid are the restrictions upon physical liberty. One may not walk except upon paths specially prepared for that purpose; he may not gather fruits where he sees them; he may not recline on the grass, however inviting, nor lounge under trees, however grateful the shade. The native fondness for freedom of movement never ceases to chafe under these restrictions and is always seeking relief by expeditions to the "country" or the mountains. And so in these early times men sought the wilderness life because of its exemptions from the artificial restraints of civilization. Like old Jim Bridger, they found the cañons of the cities (as he called the streets) too contracted for their robust freedom, and they longed for those grander avenues laid out by nature in the boundless region of the West.

The fictitious barriers which society erects between man and man, the power of wealth, the exclusiveness of rank,

were mostly absent. All were equal and shared the toil of the day and the rest of night with their fellows. Such conditions are always attractive and particularly so to those whose social and financial condition in civilized communities places them in what may be called the lower class. Moreover, long absence from the frontiers, especially from the larger towns like St. Louis, threw one out of touch with the old life, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to pick up the thread where it was left off. There was a sense of awkwardness on the part of the returned wanderer, a feeling that the old places he used to fill were occupied by some one else, that made him the more ready to get back into the prairies and mountains where conventionalities never stood in his way.

Then there was the love of adventure, so natural to the heart of everyone, that led men to the wilderness and kept them there. The excitement of the chase, the crossing of rivers and mountains, the meeting with savage tribes, all were new and interesting and drew many a youth into a kind of life which he never afterward abandoned.

The Western country was proverbially healthy, and the enforced abstinence from injurious practices kept the body well and the mind clear. If starvation often stared the hunter in the face, the disorders of an over-fed stomach never disturbed his slumbers nor sapped his constitution with disease. Men loved the country for its healthfulness.¹

There were other and less creditable reasons why the wilderness had an attraction for some. Every expedition had in its ranks not a few who had committed crimes which led them to seek immunity from punishment by getting beyond the pale of the law. Thus an old trapper back in the thirties, who has left us a record of his adventures, refers as follows to the event of his departure for home with some of his companions after an absence of three years: "On

¹ "Among our partisans in the mountains, sickness and natural deaths are almost unknown." Statement by Smith, Jackson and Sublette about 1830.

parting this time many of the men were at a loss to know what to do. Many were anxious to return to the States, but feared to do so lest the offended law might hold them responsible for misdemeanors committed previous to their embarking in the trapping business. Others could not be persuaded to return at any price, declaring that civilization had no charms for them.”²

Thus from one cause or another it resulted that men who embarked in this wild life formed a liking for it and were apt to return to it even if they abandoned it for a time. This feeling was not confined to any particular class, but prevailed equally among all. The record left by Josiah Gregg, who was always careful and conservative in his statements, is not an unusual one: “It will hardly be a matter of surprise then when I add that this passion for prairie life will be very apt to lead me upon the plains again, to spread my bed with the mustang and the buffalo under the broad canopy of heaven; there to seek to maintain undisturbed my confidence in man by fraternizing with the little prairie dogs and wild colts, and the wilder Indians — the unconquered Sabaeans of the American Deserts.” And again he says that “scarcely a day passes without my feeling a pang of regret that I am not now roving upon those western plains. Nor do I find my taste peculiar; for I have hardly known a man, who has ever become familiar with the kind of life which I have led for so many years, that has not relinquished it with regret.”

It was not, however, all who felt this way, as one may readily gather from notes of the times and particularly from the prevalence of desertions among the engagés of the American Fur Company. To them, indeed, the blessing of freedom did not fully materialize. They had in a measure jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. They had left the restraints of society for the even greater restraints and arduous toil of one of the most exacting concerns known in commercial history. It was therefore an every-day occur-

² *Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, Clearfield, Pa., 1879, p. 86.

rence for men of this class to seek escape from their obligations and to return to their homes. But on the whole it was true then as it is today, that any one who had become familiar with that wild and rugged country never lost the desire to return there.

Reference has already been made to the absence of legal restraint as one of the valued privileges pertaining to the business of the trapper, and it is an interesting question to know to what extent, if any, this condition operated to deprive men of the rights to which they are entitled in a civilized state of society. Beyond the military post of Fort Leavenworth civil and criminal jurisdiction extended only in name during the entire period covered by this work. It might be concluded from this that, as the country was literally lawless, or without means of enforcing laws, lawlessness and disorder would be the rule. Such was not the case. If due allowance be made for the fact, brought out in the preceding pages, that a considerable portion of the trapping fraternity were desperate characters, if not actual outlaws, when they entered the fur trade, it will be found that life, liberty, and the rights of property, were as much respected in the depths of the wilderness as within the best regulated of cities.

In the matter of business competition things were undoubtedly done in this remote country which could not have been done where the laws were in full force. The robbery of Fitzpatrick by the Crows, already cited, was an instance. The very year following this event Fitzpatrick refused to stand by an agreement to receive an invoice of goods from Nathaniel J. Wyeth after the latter had purchased and transported them all the way from Boston to the valley of Green river. These were the harsher features which competition in business assumed when it was possible to arrive at one's end by mere brute force.

But in reviewing the dark and shadowy transactions of a period now so deeply buried in the past, it will be well to avoid the natural inclination to compare them more unfav-

orably than they deserve with the business methods of modern times. As a matter of fact he who examines the motive as well as the deed will find it difficult to say in which period these methods stood upon the higher ground. It is not so certain that the code of the wilderness would not bear favorable comparison with that of the modern business world. Too great distinction is often made between physical and intellectual piracy and plunder. The laws of society strictly prohibit the use of superior physical force in appropriating to one's self the property of others, but they make no protest against, nay, even protect, under legal forms, the exercise of superior business sagacity in depriving an inferior of what rightfully belongs to him. It was indeed a reprehensible act in the American Fur Company secretly to instigate the Crows to rob Fitzpatrick of his furs; but the act was no less justifiable morally, though transgressing the laws of the land more openly, than have been thousands of business transactions in modern times whereby great properties have been wrecked, honest holders deprived of their securities, and financial ruin carried to innocent individuals.

When it comes to the personal relations of individuals to each other the account stands even more in favor of the wilderness. It has been demonstrated over and over again in the history of the West that the existence of laws, and the presence of lawyers to expound and of officers to enforce them, are not indispensable to a just and orderly condition in thinly settled portions of a country. It was the universal testimony of those who were familiar with the life of the trapper, and later with that of the gold-seeker, that crimes of all colors were never so few, nor punishment for such as were committed so just and swift and sure, as in those remote localities where there were neither laws nor lawyers. Men trusted each other. Unless there were circumstances to justify it, the trader or trapper was never known to "lift" the cache of his rival, even though detection and discovery were impossible. They rarely required written evidence of their agreements, for they had implicit faith in the sanctity

of an oral promise. When disputes arose the common rule was to resort to the code of the duello in some form or other, and in this way every one knew that he would be called to quick account for his delinquencies. Each man was in a measure a law to himself, but here, more than in civilized life — far more — the precepts of the Golden Rule prevailed, and every man tried to treat his neighbor fairly. Those rude men had a true sense of justice, and if they administered it in a rough fashion there was rarely any complaint that their judgments were wrong. “No court or jury is called to adjudicate upon his disputes and abuses,” says Gregg, “save his own conscience; and no powers are invoked to redress them save those with which the God of nature has endowed him.” It may be truly said that in this land without laws the personal relations of individuals to each other were as harmonious and just as they are under the most elaborate social organization.

PART II. HISTORICAL.

CHAPTER I.

LOUISIANA.

French colonial schemes in America—Early discoveries by Spain, France and England—Marquette and Joliet—La Salle—Rivalry among colonial powers—The French and Indian War—Loss of American colonies to France—American Revolution—Spain and the United States—The Louisiana Purchase—Downfall of Spanish colonial system—Lewis and Clark expedition—Pike's expedition—Advent of the trader.

THE territory which forms the theater of the events described in the following pages is mostly a part of what was once the Province of Louisiana — that boundless possession of the French government in America upon which were built the imperial hopes of princely dominion beyond the sea. Of the three principal colonizing powers of Europe — Spain, France, and England — the schemes of France in North America were the most daring and comprehensive, and their realization would have made her the foremost power in the New World. Her colonial policy, as it finally took definite form, contemplated the settlement of the valleys of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi, and their connection by a line of forts passing up each to the height of land between them. With more than half the cultivable soil of North America and the two most important systems of inland navigation in her possession, and with outlets upon the sea in widely separated directions, she would control the future destiny of the continent, confining

the British to the narrow Atlantic slope on the east, and the Spanish to the steppes and Cordilleras of the southwest. In other directions, the imagination could set no bounds to this magnificent empire, unless it were the unknown shores of the almost unknown Pacific.

It was indeed an imperial dream, but one destined never to be realized; and in strange contrast with the vastness of her designs, France proved to be the first of the three powers to retire permanently from the continent. The fruit of her labors was to be garnered in distant years by a nation whose very birth was an event still buried in the mists of futurity.

Spain had been the pioneer in the discovery and acquisition of territory in America. Columbus crossed the Atlantic in 1492. The conquest of Mexico was finished in 1521, and St. Augustine was founded in 1565. Following Spain, the French made their first permanent settlement at Port Royal, where now is Annapolis, Nova Scotia, in 1605. Two years later the English founded their first colony at Jamestown, and in the following year the French laid the foundations of Quebec. In 1620 the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. This was one hundred and twenty-eight years after the discovery of America — so slow were the European powers in following up the consequences of that great achievement. At this time the general line of advance of the three powers had taken definite form, and New France, or Canada, New Spain and Florida, New England, and Virginia, became the respective bases of operations in their struggle for the dominion of America.

Many years elapsed before any new and marked advance from these primary bases was accomplished, although in the immediate vicinity of each there were continuous development and expansion. Not until 1673 did any of the three powers attempt to learn what lay within the vast interior of the continent.¹ The first important movement in that direc-

¹A qualification of this statement ought to be made in favor of the Spanish under Hernando de Soto. That brilliant and knightly adven-

tion came from Canada. The French traders among the Indians had heard the natives tell of a great river farther to the westward which flowed neither north nor west, and which they rightly conjectured must flow into the Gulf of Mexico. Talon, the first intendant of New France, being about to visit his native land, determined to ascertain the truth of this rumor before he went. He dispatched two trusty men, Marquette, a Jesuit priest, and Joliet, a trader, to explore the region in question. On the 16th day of June, 1673, they saw the Mississippi at the mouth of the Wisconsin river. Thence they floated down the great stream, noting its important tributaries, until they arrived in the vicinity of the Arkansas. Having gone far enough to remove all doubt that the river emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, they returned, the priest to his mission on the lakes and the trader to Quebec.

Next in the valley of the Mississippi, so far as any settled purpose of discovery is concerned, was Robert Cavalier de La Salle, whose heroic work in this new field of adventure has brought to its author imperishable fame. To him must be accredited the great conception of joining the valleys of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi with a line of settlements and of establishing a colony at the mouth of the latter stream. His far-sighted vision even foresaw the time when this inland empire would extend to the Pacific and draw within its pale the commerce of oriental kingdoms. His work in carrying out this project covered ten years of his life, from 1677 to 1687, during which time he succeeded in traversing and exploring, either in person or through his colleagues, nearly the entire length of the Mississippi river. He built and garrisoned several forts along the route, and on the 7th of April, 1682, at the mouth of the Missis-

turer came upon the banks of the Mississippi near Chickasaw Bluffs, May 26, 1540, and two years later was buried beneath its waters. But his great discovery led to no marked results. Spain did not follow it up with any act of formal possession, and the country remained unclaimed and unknown for over one hundred and thirty years thereafter.

issippi, took formal possession, in the name of the King of France, of the country drained by that stream and its tributaries, and gave it the name of *Louisiana*.

Returning to France, he came back to America by way of the Gulf in 1684, prepared to found a colony at the mouth of the river. The way was lost, however, and the vessels passed on to the distant shores of what is now Texas. There a series of misfortunes overtook the enterprise which finally left La Salle with but a small party and not a ship of the several that came with him. In this distress he resolved to strike across the country to the northeast and reach his posts among the Illinois. After proceeding a considerable distance into the interior he was basely murdered by one of his own party, and a life which the most gigantic obstacles could not dismay, was cut short by the stealthy hand of treachery.

La Salle's attempts to found a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi were not resumed until a decade after his death, probably on account of the wars that were being waged between France and England. But in 1698 a squadron was sent over for this purpose under the direction of Iberville and his brothers, Bienville and Sauvolle, members of a very noted family in the naval history of France, and themselves greatly distinguished in their country's service. Iberville entered the Mississippi in a barge, March 1, 1699, probably the first European craft to enter that stream from the Gulf of Mexico, and on the 1st of May of that year a settlement was made on the Bay of Biloxi. Although it was yet eighteen years before the site of New Orleans was selected, and twenty-two before it was actually occupied by the colonial government, the foundation of the lower Louisiana colony nevertheless dates from the last year of the seventeenth century.

It may be considered as from about this time that the colonies of the new world began to be subjects of zealous rivalry on the part of the mother countries. It is true that before this they had been the scene of strife which originated

across the sea. Campaigns had been fought in Canada and in Florida. Pensacola had been lost and won. England had once wrested all of Canada from France. But in general upon the arrival of peace the new world conquests were all restored, the only considerable exception being that of Acadia, which was ceded to England in 1713. The colonies had not yet acquired that importance which gave them much weight in European councils, and it does not appear that the future destiny of America was in any adequate sense appreciated by European statesmen of the time.

But the eighteenth century was not far advanced when it became evident that the ever-expanding colonial frontiers were soon to involve the mother countries in a final struggle for supremacy upon the American continent. With jealous eyes the three great powers watched each other. The daring schemes of France in particular excited great concern on the part of her two rivals, for her position, if maintained, could not but give her a commanding influence on the continent. England's possessions were not contiguous, for there was no connection between the colonies of the coast and the territory around Hudson Bay. The colonies of Spain were likewise separated, for Louisiana lay between Florida and New Spain. But Canada and Louisiana formed one continuous possession to the future expansion of which there seemed to be no limit but the ocean.

Spain henceforth regarded the advance of her rival with a distrustful eye, and attempts of the French to open a commerce with Mexico, either by way of the Gulf or overland through Texas, were met with absolute refusal. Both nations made military advances. Spain sent an armed expedition to the neighborhood of the Missouri, but it was defeated and destroyed by the Indians. She advanced her missions well into the interior and supported them by military garrisons. In 1722 the French built the advanced post of Orleans well up the Missouri river, and they likewise established posts on the Red and Arkansas rivers.²

² See "Fort Orleans," list of posts, Appendix F.

The vicissitudes of European politics, it is true, often threw France and Spain for a time together in common cause, but never to such an extent as to remove the distrust with which each regarded the advance of the other into the unsettled territories between their American colonies.

In the fast approaching struggle for supremacy, which clearly could not long be averted, there was a great advantage on the side of England, arising from her more liberal colonial policy. Largely left to care for themselves, the settlements on the Atlantic coast expanded with a rapidity which formed a marked contrast to the slow and sickly growth of the French and Spanish colonies; for the policy of these two nations was to regulate colonial affairs entirely from home; to impose restrictions in trade, industry, and religion; to recruit the colonies from jails and houses of correction, and to grant their trade and commerce to individuals or companies. The blindness of certain governments in this respect is proverbial, and the experience of four hundred years has even yet failed to awaken the government of Spain to the true cause of her many colonial failures.

The various grants of land by Great Britain in North America, with their absurd western extensions, in some instances reaching to the Pacific, carried in themselves the seeds of future discord along the colonial frontiers. It was her advance into the valley of the Mississippi, or its principal tributary, the Ohio, that precipitated the final conflict. Those stirring times of 1753 and 1754, in which the personality of George Washington was ushered upon the stage of history, are familiar to everyone. The French and Indian War was, in its far-reaching consequences, the most important ever waged upon the soil of America, excepting possibly the late Civil War in the United States. Accustomed as Americans are to look upon the Revolutionary War as the fundamental fact about which their national destiny turns, they seldom pause to inquire what that Revolution would have amounted to, but for the

results of the war that preceded it. The contest which gave this country to the Anglo-Saxon instead of to the Latin race, was one that assured the greatness of its future destiny. It was terminated by the treaty of Paris, February 10, 1763, by which France ceded to Great Britain Canada and all of Louisiana east of the Mississippi, excepting New Orleans and its island. Three months before this time the French King had given to Spain all of his American possessions not included in the pending treaty with England. Thus that nation, which at one time possessed the cream of the continent, was now left without a foot of its territory; and the two rivals between whom her possessions were divided confronted each other from opposite shores of the Mississippi.

And now comes another turn of the wheel of political fortune second in importance only to the results of the French and Indian War. Great Britain, in a moment of ill-advisement, abandoned the liberal policy which had so far made her colonies flourish altogether more prosperously than those of her rivals, and undertook to put into effect those restrictions and regulations which have been a blight to the growth of every colony where they have prevailed. Unfortunately for her, this attempt came too late in the process of colonial development to meet with anything else than stubborn resistance. Angered at this the mother country undertook to compel obedience by force. The world knows the result. A successful revolution ensued in which Great Britain lost all of her original colonies in America and all her conquests except Canada. In their place arose an independent nation destined to play a brilliant rôle in the future history of mankind.

The Mississippi had now become the frontier between the most conservative and bigoted of monarchies, and the youngest and most liberal of republics. It was not a change which Spain could view with satisfaction. The youthful blood and vigor of a new nation, established upon the very soil which before was only a colonial dependency, boded no

good to the existing status of the Spanish upon the Mississippi. It was natural, therefore, that Spain should view the expansion of the population of the United States to the westward with feelings of apprehension and alarm. She sought by every possible means to obstruct it. She strove to detach the western country from the Union and incorporate it in her territories, so that the Mississippi and its tributaries might be under her own control. At one time there was a ray of hope in these designs, but as the new government became better established, as the Indians came to fear and respect it, and particularly when states west of the Alleghenies were admitted into the Union, these delusive prospects vanished forever.

It would be amusing, were it not an event of such profound importance, to note how suddenly the vast territory which Spain had received from France passed into the hands of the youthful rival whom she was watching with such suspicious dread. Napoleon Bonaparte had appeared upon the stage of history. Under his irresistible sway the mutations of fortune among European nations went on with terrific rapidity. Spain fell into his hands, and among the terms of peace wrung from her was the cession of Louisiana, which was accomplished by the secret treaty of Saint Ildefonso, March 21, 1801.

To the United States the right of the free navigation of the Mississippi was a matter of such overshadowing importance that her statesmen had ever been alert and watchful for any opportunity which might establish it more perfectly. They were not slow to discern, in the rapid changes at the time passing over Europe, that the occasion might arise which would hasten or retard, as the event might turn, this primary object of their desires. The cession of Louisiana to France, as rumors of that event began to circulate, was rightly viewed with grave apprehension. Might not that genius, which had overridden and reduced to his own will the venerable monarchies of Europe, turn his attention to the New World and attempt the conquest of that also? Would

he be satisfied with restoring France to her own, or would he seek to embrace within his western empire the whole of North America? The boundless ambition of Napoleon no doubt reached so far. But the reality was not to be, and it is another proof of his unerring judgment that he was among the first to realize the impracticability of his schemes of empire in America. England controlled the seas, and the defense of Louisiana against such a power was impossible. He saw that in case of war with Great Britain, he would not only lose Louisiana, but lose it to the very power which he most desired to impoverish and humiliate. This contingency did in fact arise, and Napoleon took prompt measures to forestall its inevitable consequences and to thwart forever the ambition of England in this direction. He sold Louisiana to the United States on the 30th of April, 1803.

The announcement of the re-cession of Louisiana to France had hardly crossed the Atlantic and become known upon the Mississippi, when that of its sale to the United States arrived. It was at once apparent that this was the *finale* to the fitful changes in the past career of the colony. The new order of things was by no means generally acceptable to the foreign element of the population, either Spanish or French. They saw in it the death knell of their peculiar customs and laws, and they knew that the enterprising spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race would crowd them out of the avenues of industry and commerce even on the very soil where they had lived and toiled from infancy. But on the other hand the more discerning felt that it was at least a prospect of permanency in place of change, of self-government in place of the capricious rule of distant princes, of freedom in religion, industry, and commerce, in place of baneful restrictions and regulations. The transfer was made without serious disturbance; the current of affairs soon began to run smoothly, and it was not long before the most ardent lover of his parent country, whether France or Spain, ceased to regret the change.

Although digressing beyond the limits assigned to this work, it will not be amiss to refer to those subsequent events in the colonial history of Spain which show how well founded was her jealousy of the growing power of the United States. It was in 1804 that the transfer of Louisiana was consummated. Fifteen years later came the cession of Florida. In the course of the next twenty years successful revolution had extinguished Spanish sovereignty upon the continent of America, and before the nineteenth century had finished half its course the major part of the vast colony of New Spain had entered the expanding fold of the Republic of States.

But the downward career of Spanish empire had not yet run its disastrous course. In the providence of history the United States has been the instrument of retributive justice in punishing Spain for the accumulated wrong of centuries of colonial misrule. It was a fitting climax to the progress of Anglo-Saxon liberty throughout the world during the nineteenth century that it should fall to the lot of the American Republic, before the century was complete, to sweep away forever the last vestige of Spanish sovereignty in the Western World: nay, further, to supplant it in the distant Orient, until that once powerful nation, which discovered America and planted its flag in every clime, is left with only a few scattering islands, the pitiful remnants of world-wide colonial dominion.

President Jefferson, to whose administration belongs the credit of the Louisiana Purchase, lost no time in acquainting himself with the nature and extent of his new acquisition. The formal surrender of Lower Louisiana to the United States took place at New Orleans December 20, 1803. During the following winter, explorations were made by direction of the government along the Red and Washita rivers. An expedition was organized in the fall of 1803 to ascend the Missouri and cross to the Pacific ocean, but as possession of Upper Louisiana had not yet been given up, it was delayed until the following spring. On the 10th of

March, 1804, at the city of St. Louis, formal surrender of Upper Louisiana was made to the United States, thus fulfilling the terms of the treaty with France. On the 14th of May, Lewis and Clark set out on their long and perilous expedition. This celebrated performance stands as incomparably the most perfect achievement of its kind in the history of the world. The expedition reached the Pacific ocean, November 16, 1805, set out on the return journey March 23, 1806, and arrived in St. Louis September 23, 1806. The journey was accomplished with the loss of only one man, who died from causes apparently in no way connected with the expedition.³ The information gathered was so exhaustive and correct that *Lewis and Clark* continued to be the standard authority on the region traversed by the expedition for fully forty years thereafter.

In the meantime Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike had ascended the Mississippi river from St. Louis to its source, acquainting the Indians and traders in that section with the change of ownership of Louisiana. After his return to St. Louis he set out in 1806 to explore the country to the southwest as far as to the Spanish frontier in the direction of Santa Fe. He passed westward through what are now Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado until he reached the mountains, and then turned south into Spanish territory, where he was arrested by the authorities of that ever jealous and suspicious government. After much delay he was released, and he returned to the United States in July, 1807.

These important explorations bring this preliminary sketch down to the period covered by the present work.

³Sergeant Charles Floyd, who died near the present site of Sioux City, August 20, 1804. Nearly a century after his death, the government of the United States, aided by the State of Iowa, erected a suitable monument over the grave of the first soldier of the United States who died west of the Mississippi river. This monument is a solid masonry obelisk one hundred feet high, and was dedicated May 30, 1901. It was designed and erected under the supervision of the author of this work.

Louisiana was now national territory. Official explorations had been made in all directions, and the acts of formal possession were at an end. Some forty years, however, were yet to elapse before this vast territory was to engage the serious attention of the world. In the meanwhile, it was given over to the trader and trapper, the hunter and adventurer, the traveler and the missionary. In desultory fashion it was explored in all directions, and lines of travel gradually developed. Slowly but surely emigration began to seek those remote regions, and by 1843 it had set heavily in that direction. Then followed in startling rapidity those events which in less than seven years made this country well known throughout the world, and transformed the great West into a theatre of commercial and industrial activity.

It is of the fragments of history that fill up this formative period of less than two score years that we purpose here to treat; to recover as far as possible those obscure beginnings in the founding of a great empire which the historian has neglected for the more alluring themes connected with the building of the superstructure.

CHAPTER II.

RISE OF THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE.

Importance of the fur trade in American history — France the pioneer in the fur trade — Spanish fur trade — Great Britain and the fur trade — Rise of the Hudson Bay Company — Rise of the Northwest Company — Rivalry between the two companies — Amalgamation of the two companies — Business methods of the Hudson Bay Company — The Mackinaw Company — Spanish fur companies — Tardy development of an American fur trade — Trade of the Northwest coast — State of American fur trade in 1807.

THE fur trade is indissolubly connected with the history of North America. For more than two centuries it was the principal business, and often the only one, transacted upon the frontiers. The visionary dreams of the early explorers, that the new world abounded in precious metals awaiting only their arrival to be gathered in inexhaustible quantities, led the first adventurers upon this coast to seek the wealth of the mine rather than that of the forest. The Spanish were slow to abandon this alluring motive of discovery and conquest, and the treasures which they had been able to wrest from the more civilized races of the continent served to keep alive their zeal in this direction long after any real reason for its existence had disappeared. But at a very early day the French and English turned their attention, in their New World projects, to more substantial, if less attractive, fields of enterprise. North America, above those latitudes where a semi-tropical climate prevails, was, at the time of its discovery, the richest and most extensive field for collecting fine furs upon the face of the earth. The conditions encountered here seemed to have been especially prepared by nature to facilitate the exploitation of this particular species of wealth. The continent

was thinly populated with a wild race of men who dwelt in the wilderness and passed their lives in common neighborhood with the native fauna. Although the fur-bearing animals supplied the Indian with food, clothing, and shelter, still his numbers were not sufficient to prevent their increase, and both man and beast dwelt and bred their species on a common ground. The stranger came from across the ocean, introducing new wants to the Indian, which the latter was able to gratify by giving the native furs in exchange for the white man's goods. The shrewd trader was thus enabled, at trifling cost to himself, to put an army of these native fur gatherers into the field, and the product obtained in this way he retailed in Europe at an enormous profit. Fortune seekers both in France and England were quick to grasp the importance of this new mine of wealth, and individuals or companies in both countries petitioned their governments for exclusive privileges in its development. Royal grants for this purpose thus came to be a prominent feature of American colonial history.

The valley of the St. Lawrence became the first, and remained the principal, field of this business, with Montreal as its chief emporium. Nature had fitted this valley as the great commercial highway of the fur trade. Through an unknown and unexplored wilderness, where no overland route existed, a chain of lakes and a net work of rivers gave easy access to almost every portion. Low portages connected the lakes on the south and west with the Mississippi valley, whence the Missouri opened a way to the distant mountains. To the north the transfer was easy to another system of waterways connected with Hudson Bay and the rivers that flowed from the limitless expanse of the northwest, beyond which, by somewhat difficult portages, lay the great rivers of the Pacific coast. The St. Lawrence valley was thus the natural highway for the peculiar trade of the wilderness, and for two hundred years it was the scene of a traffic unparalleled for romantic interest in the history of commerce.

ment gave to other parties the exclusive right of trade in these regions, and Groseilliers saw his well-laid schemes destroyed in their very beginning. Disappointed, he returned to France and sought redress from his government for what he considered an injustice to himself and his associate. Failing in this he addressed himself successfully to the English court. Under the patronage of Prince Rupert he was outfitted with a vessel and cargo, and in 1668 sailed for Hudson Bay. Well nigh at the southeastern extremity of the bay he built the first post ever erected on its shores and named it Fort Charles for the English king.

This success led to the formation of the famous monopoly officially known as The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England, trading into Hudson Bay, but known in common parlance as the Hudson Bay Company. The date of the charter was May 2, 1670. The privileges granted were such as no other company ever enjoyed. Over a region of unknown extent it was given absolute proprietorship, supreme jurisdiction in civil and military affairs, the power to make laws, and to declare war against pagan peoples, and in fact nearly all the attributes of a sovereign and independent government.

This monopoly did not enjoy throughout its career a smooth and prosperous existence. In its earlier years it received repeated checks from the French, who claimed the territory included in its charter — a claim that was subsequently on one occasion recognized by the British Government. The French made several expeditions both by sea and land against the company's establishments. They were generally successful, and the forts were at one time all captured and some of them destroyed. The operations in these waters, in which the brothers d'Iberville, founders of the Louisiana colony, greatly distinguished themselves, were almost uniformly favorable to France and highly creditable to her navy. But the fur company did not succumb to these reverses and kept right on with its operations. Later events turned the tide in its favor. The Treaty of Utrecht, 1713,

greatly curtailed the rights of France as recognized in the Treaty of Ryswick, 1697, while the Treaty of Paris, 1763, abrogated them altogether, and left England undisputed sovereign of North America except to the west and southwest of the Mississippi, and on the Pacific coast.

Thus the rising monopoly was for a time relieved of its troublesome interlopers, and enjoyed the uninterrupted exercise of its trade. It did not pursue an aggressive commercial policy. It did not seek a rapid extension of the field of its operations, and it built but few posts. It sought to secure its furs by trade with the Indians rather than by its own hunters, for it would thus more surely protect the fur-bearing animals from extinction. This prudent management was very profitable. The stock rose greatly in value. Admission to the company was difficult, and the managers sought to conceal all knowledge of the country, or at least to depreciate its importance, in order not to arouse inquiry or induce pressure for a share in its privileges. Had there been a well-defined boundary of its territories so that it could have excluded with certainty all intruders, there is no telling how long this quiet prosperity might have gone on undisturbed. But to the west and southwest there was nothing definite as to boundaries, and a rival presently arose which was only too ready to take advantage of this important fact.

This rival was the Northwest Company of Montreal. It was the outgrowth of the old French trade in the region of the upper lakes and beyond. As that trade began to rally from the destructive effects of the French and Indian War, it fell principally into the hands of a few Scotchmen, leading merchants of Montreal, who for several years acted in the main independently of each other. The trade began to revive about 1766, and by 1780 had regained a large part of its former vigor. But the evil effects of individual competition, and the loss of profits due to the smallpox scourge of 1782, induced the leading traders to enter into an association for the common pursuit of the business. This

took place in the winter of 1783-4, and the new company was styled the Northwest Company of Montreal.

At this time the traders had already established their great emporium upon the northern shore of Lake Superior, where their business was conducted with the remote and vast interior. This was the Grand Portage, which was connected by a road about ten miles long with the water courses above the falls of Pigeon river, whence a water route led all the way to the very base of the mountains.

The new company, like the Hudson Bay Company, had rough sailing in the earlier years of its existence. Not all of the Montreal traders were satisfied with the new arrangement. A rival association was organized under the name of Pond, Pangman and Company, including Alexander Mackenzie, who later became famous through his explorations. Pond soon deserted to the older company, and was largely responsible for a tragedy which grew out of the rivalry between the two concerns. This was the killing of John Ross, a trader of the smaller company. So alarmed were the parties on both sides at the possible consequences of this event, that a union of the two factions was formed in 1787, from which date the full career of the Northwest Company may be said to have begun.

The operations of the company from this time on were conducted on a truly imperial scale. One of the partners, Alexander Mackenzie, began a series of explorations of the northwest, which, in 1793, carried him to the Pacific ocean. Another far-reaching movement was the engagement, as astronomer and surveyor for the company, of David Thompson, who had lately left the service of the Hudson Bay Company. He was directed to survey the 49th parallel, which formed the international boundary west of Rainy Lake, to explore the country along that line, and to find suitable locations for the company's posts as its operations should extend farther to the westward. Thompson's work carried him to the Missouri river at the Mandans, and later to the mouth of the Columbia. It had an influence on

national affairs quite beyond its importance in the business of the company.

Meanwhile the regular trading operations of the company were pushed with aggressive vigor in all directions. After eight years of uninterrupted progress, further dissension arose in the company councils resulting in a separation. The seceding partners were led by Alexander Mackenzie, and the old company by Simon McTavish. Mackenzie went to England, published his travels, received the honor of knighthood, and returning to Canada in 1801, was instrumental in organizing the New Northwest Company, or as it was generally known, the XY Company.¹ The rivalry between the two factions went on with vigor until the death of McTavish, in 1804. In the following year a coalition was formed and the united company became stronger than ever.

When the Northwest Company came into existence its headquarters were at Montreal, and its principal depot at the Grand Portage. The operations of the company had extended far into the northwest, between the Hudson Bay territories on the one hand and Louisiana on the other, and embraced considerable territory in the United States. The trade had been carried quite to the base of the Rocky mountains, and as already stated one of the traders had crossed to the Pacific ocean, being the first white man to perform this feat north of the Spanish possessions. As a result of surveys it was found that the depot at the Grand Portage was on United States territory, and a new post was built farther north and named Fort William in honor of William McGillivray, chief agent of the company at Montreal. It was at Fort William that the agents from Montreal and the wintering partners from the interior assembled each summer for the exchange of outfits and the determination of plans for the ensuing year.

¹ The use of these letters is explained by a recent writer as being entirely accidental and arising from the fact that they were the letters of the alphabet which immediately followed the last of the letters N W., the initials of the Northwest Company.

The daring enterprise of the Northwest Company, and the bold extension of its operations regardless of the territorial rights of the Hudson Bay Company, forced that lethargic concern into active resistance. Inasmuch as we are here only indirectly concerned with the operations of these companies, it may be permitted to step a few years ahead of our narrative to note the outcome of this contest. The rivalry between the two companies knew almost no bounds. Wherever one might establish a post the other would plant one beside it in order to watch its operations and forestall any advantage of position. When opportunity occurred, forts were burned, property confiscated, and even lives sacrificed, for the criminal and civil jurisdiction of Canada did not yet reach to these remote regions, and there was no government restraint upon acts of lawlessness.

Finally the Hudson Bay Company took a radical step to annoy and harass their opponent. In the year 1811 they granted to the Earl of Selkirk a large tract of land in the Red River valley, between the United States boundary and Lake Winnipeg, for the purpose of founding there a colony. The Northwest Company resisted by the most energetic measures this encroachment upon what they claimed as their rights. The new settlement extended directly athwart their path to the westward, and cut their territory in two. They determined that it should not be made. Lord Selkirk, who was a benevolent, high-minded and able man, had embarked his private fortune, and based his dearest hopes, upon the upbuilding of this colony, and he was in no sense disposed to yield. The brunt of the struggle fell upon the innocent colonists, and the stories of their misfortunes during the ten years following are among the most touching and pathetic in the history of North American settlement. The struggle at length reached a climax in 1816, when it attained the proportions of actual war between the Northwest people on the one side and the Hudson Bay people with the colonists on the other. Many lives were lost on both sides, but the colonists suffered most severely.

The grave aspect which this rivalry had now assumed was such that it could no longer escape the attention of the mother country. The contestants were brought into court, and in 1819 the matter was laid before the British parliament. It is said that over half a million dollars were expended in litigation without effecting any satisfactory settlement. Finally the inevitable course, which had long been pointed out by more far-sighted men,² that of coalition, took place in 1821, the united company retaining the name of the older rival. New regulations relating to criminal and civil jurisdiction were promulgated, and new descriptions of boundaries were made. The rights of the company were not materially abridged, while its territories were vastly extended, and its power for peaceful commerce increased. Meanwhile the noble efforts of Lord Selkirk began to prosper, and the Red river colony secured a new and permanent lease of life.

The organization of the Hudson Bay and Northwest companies, their internal regulations, method of dealing with the Indians, and policy in preserving the fur-bearing animals from extinction, were the outgrowth of long experience, and embodied the highest wisdom in the management of their extensive affairs. The experience of each of the rivals was added to that of the other in the amalgamated company after 1821, and formed one of the most perfect commercial organizations of which the world has any knowledge. The systems of service and promotion protected the company from incompetent servants. To gain high position in the service, one must begin at the bottom and work up. All must work for the company's interest, and none were allowed to engage in any private trade. Employes were frequently changed in station to break up any irregular practices which might grow up with long residence in one place, and this rotation was taken advantage of to reward faithful service and punish the reverse. The company's officers had power to try and punish offenders.

² Mackenzie had suggested the advisability of union as early as 1801.

Military duty was exacted whenever necessary, and a regular uniform was provided. The whole organization, from the governor down through factors, traders, and clerks, to the lowest *mangeur de lard*, was based upon the principle of perfect discipline, absolute subordination of individual interest to that of the company, and a regular promotion based upon merit. Long experience had perfected all parts of this intricate machine, and not even the greatest of modern railway systems can excel it in thoroughness of detail and organization.

In its dealings with the Indians the same wise policy was apparent. Where not necessary to meet competition the sale of liquor to the natives was not generally indulged in. All trade was upon a fixed, though just, basis, and the Indians knew exactly what to expect. The traders were men of experience with the natives, and were well acquainted with the Indian character. Intermarriage with native women was common, from the chief officers down to the ranks, and thus bonds of mutual interest were created. Although this company did not always escape difficulties with the Indians, it was generally on terms of peace with them, and its hold upon them as against irregular traders was well-nigh absolute. It may readily be seen how powerless must have been a private trader and even a strong company against this embodiment of power, wealth, experience and organization. We shall have occasion in the course of these pages to note several attempts to enter the field in competition with the company, and their invariable result in failure.

There was another British company which occupied a place of some prominence in the early fur trade, and which was founded after the career of the Northwest Company had well begun. From the fact that its headquarters and principal establishment were at Michilimackinac, it was generally known as the Mackinaw Company. It operated mainly within the territories of the United States, around the shores of Lake Michigan and westward to the Mississippi, and in Canadian territory east of Lake Huron.

At St. Louis in the days of Spanish rule there were companies trading under grants from the governor of Louisiana. Maxent, Laclede and Company was one of these. After the death of Laclede the company was dissolved and others took its place. Down to the time of the cession there had been several of these associations, and the trade had extended well up the Missouri and far out into the prairies. None of these companies ever attained any extensive success.

✓ In the United States no great company arose until late in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Circumstances had been unfavorable to the building up of the trade. The War of the Revolution absorbed the attention of the people, and its termination left them little prepared to enter at once upon great commercial undertakings. The Indians were generally hostile, and under British influence. For a number of years Great Britain continued to hold the posts along the upper lakes, whereby the trade of those regions was kept in the hands of her own subjects. For a decade or more after the peace with Great Britain the obstacles to the organization of an American fur company were almost insuperable. Such organization as did finally ensue was brought about mainly through the efforts of one man, a foreigner by birth, John Jacob Astor. The career of this king of the American fur trade will be noted more at length in our treatment of his great enterprise on the Pacific coast.

There still remains to be noticed the trade of the north-west coast, which bears an intimate relation to the history not only of the American fur trade, but of the nation itself. The trade was originated by the Russians as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. The motive which led adventurers from this nation to the American coast was the great abundance there of sea otter, whose fur is the most precious known. These furs the Russians collected and carried to the Siberian coast, whence they were transported partly to the interior and partly to the frontier of China. The operations of these traders extended along the coast

from Bering Strait to Vancouver Island, and were the foundation of Russian claims to territorial sovereignty on that portion of the American continent.

American traders also obtained a foothold in the lucrative trade of the northwest coast. The celebrated voyage of Captain Cook, 1776-80, made known to the world this reservoir of wealth; but as it was several years before an authentic account of the voyage appeared, the results of the discovery were not immediately taken advantage of. In 1787, shortly after the appearance of the narrative of Cook's discoveries, some Boston merchants, enthused by his reports, undertook to send some ships to see what was to be found there. This was the beginning of the American trade on this coast, a trade which soon developed almost to the proportions of a monopoly; for down to the time of the War of 1812 there were more than three times as many American vessels engaged in it as those of all other nations together.

The trade, as practiced by the Boston merchants, developed into quite a system. A cruise ordinarily lasted three years. The vessel would leave home with suitable merchandise, in time to reach the coast in the spring of the year. After trading all summer along the coast, it would go to the Sandwich Islands for winter, and would return again the following spring. After another season's trade it would sail with its cargo to China, exchange it for goods suitable to the American market, and then return home.

✓ Briefly to summarize what has been related on the subject of the American fur trade, its status at about the year 1807 was as follows: The Hudson Bay and Northwest companies were fighting for supremacy in the country northwestward from Lake Superior. The southern line of their operations lay well within United States territories, touching the sources of the Mississippi and extending to the Missouri in the vicinity of the Mandan villages. The Mackinaw Company and other traders controlled the territory about the upper lakes and westward to the Mississippi. John Jacob Astor was gradually getting a hold upon the

American trade, and was already forming the schemes which occupied his later life. The various St. Louis traders carried on their business up the Mississippi for some distance, but mainly up the Missouri and its tributaries, having already encountered the Northwest Company on the upper river. A large part of their trade at this time was along the Osage and Kansas rivers and southward toward the Arkansas. A few isolated expeditions had gone as far west as the Rocky mountains, and one or two attempts had been made to penetrate to Santa Fe. Lewis and Clark had crossed to the Pacific and had returned, making known the vast resources of the upper tributaries of the Missouri and of the country beyond. Pike had made a similar expedition to the southwest. With these extensive regions now under the flag of the United States, the field of enterprise in the fur trade was open to all who chose to embark in it. Traders at once prepared to improve the opportunities thus thrown open to them, and their enterprises thereafter went on unceasingly until the onward march of civilization terminated them altogether.

CHAPTER III.

ST. LOUIS.

Importance as an emporium of trade—Founding of the city—Laclede—Spanish rule at St. Louis—The “Affair of 1780”—Transfer of Upper Louisiana to the United States—Early growth of St. Louis—Advent of the steamboat—Early population of St. Louis—The fur trade—Comparison of the old city with the new.

IT is doubtful if history affords the example of another city which has been the exclusive mart for so vast an extent of country as that which was tributary to St. Louis during the entire period embraced in this work. Every route of trade or adventure to the remote regions of the west centered in St. Louis. The very location at the mouth of the Missouri gave it monopoly of all trade originating in the valley of that stream, whether among the wild tribes of the mountains three thousand miles away, or among the infant settlements which were advancing with slow but sure footstep along the lower course of the river. The Oregon Trail, which began, as an independent line of travel, near the present site of Kansas City, Mo., brought down the tribute from the high mountain sections of the central west, from the interior basin of the Great Salt Lake, and to some extent from the more remote regions on the Pacific slope. In like manner the Santa Fe Trail, which left the Missouri river at the same point as did the Oregon Trail, and was coincident with it for some distance west, carried to and fro that peculiar commerce which long existed with the foreign city of Santa Fe, and even with the distant provinces of old Mexico and of southern California.

Following the lines of trade, all travel to the Far West, whether for pleasure or for scientific research, all exploring

expeditions, all military movements, all intercourse with the Indians, and even the enterprises of the missionaries in that distant country, made St. Louis their starting point and base of operations.

It was here that trans-shipment of commerce was made to eastern markets by way of the Mississippi, the Ohio, or the Great Lakes. Warehouses and mercantile establishments arose for outfitting the numberless expeditions to the interior. The government maintained a military post near by, and had here its principal office of Indian affairs for the trans-Mississippi tribes.

The city of St. Louis is therefore in the fullest sense an historic datum for all events which transpired during this period in the vast regions to the westward; and some notice of its contemporaneous history is indispensable to a complete exposition of our subject.

St. Louis is one of the few American cities of the first class whose birth antedates the birth of the Union. Boston, New York, and Philadelphia on the Atlantic, Detroit on the Great Lakes, New Orleans on the Gulf, San Francisco on the Pacific, and St. Louis in the interior, comprise the number. The founding of St. Louis and the choice of its location appear to be closely related to that event which has already been referred to as the most important in American history — the conquest of Canada and eastern Louisiana by the English. In 1762 the firm of Maxent, Laclede and Company of New Orleans was granted the exclusive trade of the Missouri river and of the Mississippi as far as to the mouth of the river St. Peters. The grant was an important one, and the company took prompt steps to realize its advantages; but as they had to organize a large and costly expedition and send to Europe for their merchandise, it was not until August 3, 1763, that they were able to leave New Orleans.

The responsibility of selecting a site for the company's proposed establishment was entrusted to one of its number, Pierre Laclede Liguist, who is described as a man of ability

and well qualified for so important a duty. Among his companions was Auguste Chouteau, then a lad of only thirteen, who, notwithstanding his extreme youth, is said to have been Laclede's most trusted subordinate.

When the expedition left New Orleans the news of the Treaty of Paris and that of the cession of the west bank of the Mississippi to Spain had not yet arrived. Laclede therefore set out on his long journey in the belief that the country included in his grant was still a dependency of France. The progress of keelboat navigation up the devious course of the Mississippi was very slow, and the summer and autumn had worn away before the expedition arrived in the neighborhood of the French settlements above the mouth of the Ohio. Here in all probability Laclede received his first intimation of the cession of the east bank of the river to Great Britain, and at once saw that this event was of great consequence to the future of his enterprise. We are led to infer that it was his desire to build his post on the east bank of the river, where he would be among his own people, in easier reach of supplies, and protected against danger from the Indians on the opposite bank. But now this choice was no longer open to him.

The season was too far advanced when he reached St. Genevieve, the lowest of the upper settlements, and the only one then located on the west bank, to permit him to establish his post before winter would set in, and it became imperative to find a place where he could store his merchandise until spring. The village of St. Genevieve had no available building of sufficient capacity, and Laclede was perplexed to know what to do, when a messenger arrived from M. De Neyon de Villiers, commandant at Fort de Chartres on the east shore, offering Laclede the necessary accommodations at that place until the English should arrive. Laclede promptly accepted the offer, and arrived at Fort de Chartres November 3d, just three months after leaving New Orleans.

After having made such arrangements as he could to

carry on a trade from Fort de Chartres during the winter, he set out with Chouteau and a small party in December to select the site of his post. The news of the cession of the east bank of the river to Great Britain had the effect of enlarging Laclede's views of the future of his proposed establishment. He saw that there would be a large emigration of the French from the Illinois settlements, for many of the inhabitants would refuse to live under English rule. They could not return to Canada, for that was also included in the cession, and New Orleans was a thousand miles away. Why not offer them a refuge at the place where he proposed to build his post? The idea evidently became a part of Laclede's plan, for Chouteau, who later wrote a narrative of these events, repeatedly refers to his selection of a site as the place of his proposed "settlement" or "village."

The choice of site now being restricted to the west bank, and as near as possible to the mouth of the Missouri, yet below it, lest traffic descending either stream might be compelled to ascend the other in order to reach the post, the situation where St. Louis now stands was certain to be selected. Here was a bold, firm bank, high enough to give immunity from floods, yet not so high as to be inaccessible in loading and unloading cargoes; a bench of land broad enough for the proposed village; and a safe and commodious channel close to the shore, where boats could be loaded and unloaded with ease and safety. Add to these desirable features that the surroundings were of great beauty, the site evidently salubrious, and the quick eye of Laclede told him that he had found what he was after. He might have followed the shore for many a mile in either direction without finding its superior.

Chouteau says that Laclede "was delighted to see the situation, and did not hesitate a moment to form there the establishment that he proposed. . . . After having examined all thoroughly, he fixed upon the place where he wished to form his settlement, marked with his own hand some trees," and then gave Chouteau explicit directions as

to what he desired to have done. Upon his return to Fort de Chartres he expressed his great satisfaction with the site selected, and even indulged the prediction that here would yet arise "one of the finest cities in America."

Navigation opened early in the following spring, and Chouteau set out in the beginning of February with thirty men, "nearly all mechanics," and reached the site of the proposed establishment on the 14th of that month.¹ On the morning of the 15th work was begun in earnest, and ground was broken for the first time to erect buildings where now stand the stately edifices of a city of half a million people. Laclede arrived early in April and "occupied himself with his settlement, fixed the place where he wished to build his house, laid the plan of the village he wished to form, and named it St. Louis in honor of Louis XV.,² whose subject he expected to remain for a long time."

Thus in the midst of the solitudes of a yet unexplored country, upon the shores of the greatest river of the continent, this small band of practical men, eschewing all ostentatious ceremony or display, and guided solely by the natural fitness of the situation for the purposes of peaceful commerce, laid the foundations of the future metropolis of the Mississippi valley. Not least of the honors which have befallen men in the past is that of having chosen from the wilderness those situations where their posterity has loved to dwell; where it has opened its marts of trade and industry; where it has built its temples of learning and religion, and where it has assembled that infinite variety of the products of civilization which unite to form a great city. Such an honor will ever attach to the name of Pierre Laclede Liguist.³

¹ There is some discrepancy among the authorities as to this date, but the one here given has the weight of evidence in its favor.

² Named indirectly in honor of Louis XV., by giving it the name of his patron saint, St. Louis, who was Louis IX. of France.

³ The view of the founding of St. Louis which I have here given is at variance with the conclusions of certain historians of St. Louis, who maintain that Laclede was ignorant of the Treaty of Paris until after

Although the residents of the newly-formed village were not aware of the fact, they were at this time virtually subjects of the King of Spain, and so remained for just about forty years, when the city passed to its final place in the history of nations. It was not at once that the Spanish assumed possession. Laclède remained sole director of the colony for upward of a year, or until the arrival of St. Ange de Bellerive. This officer had been left at Fort de Chartres by De Neyon de Villiers to surrender that post and the surrounding country to the English; and immediately upon the consummation of this event he withdrew his troops to St. Louis. By general consent he was placed in charge of the affairs of the young settlement, and so remained until 1770, May 20, when the first Spanish governor, Don Pedro Piernas, assumed control. There were seven Spanish governors in all, and with one exception their administrations were highly acceptable to the people, to a degree, in fact, which forms a bright exception to the general unpopularity of Spanish colonial government.⁴

he had selected his site. In doing this they are obliged to treat the narrative of Auguste Chouteau as a mere fabrication—an ingenious after-thought designed to give a philosophical explanation of a very fortunate event. Such a course is a drastic one, to say the least, for even if we are to assume that this distinguished pioneer were willing to pervert the facts of history to his own credit, the motive in this case is wanting. Whatever may have been the cause of the selection of the site, whether that above given or some other, the credit of it would nevertheless redound to the good judgment of the founder.

The view of these writers is apparently based on the fact that news of the cession did not reach New Orleans for some months after Laclède's departure. It ignores the other fact that the news might, and probably did, first reach the settlements of the Illinois by another route than that of the lower Mississippi. Tidings of such deep importance to all the colonists of both countries would not travel slowly, and it is entirely within the range of possibility—it is even highly probable—that the Illinois settlements knew what had happened before Laclède arrived at St. Genevieve. The time required to reach the Mississippi, either by way of the Great Lakes or by the Ohio, would make this possible.

⁴ Don Pedro Piernas, from May 20, 1770, to May, 1775; Don Fran-

For the most part the affairs of the colony moved on very smoothly. There was but one serious menace from the Indians, and that was far from being as important as historians have represented. It is known as the "affair of 1780," and undoubtedly grew directly from the struggle then going on between Great Britain and her American colonies. The country to the eastward of the Mississippi had been wrested from the English through the valor of General George Rogers Clark, and there were some attempts to retake it. One of these, to all appearances, was the incursion of the Indians in 1780, and their abortive attempt upon Kaskaskia, on the east bank of the river. Failing in their main purpose, some of them crossed to the west bank, May 26, 1780, and murdered six people on the Grand Prairie, some four or five miles northwest of St. Louis. This occurrence became magnified in the course of time into a terrible attack upon the infant village, in which some sixty inhabitants lost their lives, many more were wounded, and others carried into captivity. But slight as it actually was, it produced a deep impression upon the community. The people had grown to believe that their village was privileged with immunity from Indian attacks, for nothing of the kind had ever occurred. No fortifications had been erected, and so great was the feeling of security that certain rumors of attack, which are said to have been afloat for several days prior to the events just related, were cast aside as unworthy of attention. But after this affair no time was lost in placing the village in a state of defense. A line of fortifications was built around it, and the citizens for a long time faithfully guarded it. But this was the last, as it had been the first, serious danger from the Indians which ever threatened St. Louis, unless we include the many individual out-

cisco Cruzat, from May, 1775, to 1778; Don Fernando de Leyba, from 1778 until his death, June 28, 1780; Silvio Francisco Cartabona (acting governor), from June 28, 1780, until the arrival of the new governor; Don Manuel Perez, from November 25, 1787, to 1793; Zenon Trudeau, from 1793 to August 29, 1799; Charles Deshault Delassus, from August 29, 1799, to end of Spanish rule, March 9, 1804.

rages which were committed upon the settlers by the Osage Indians, and by the Sacs and Foxes during the War of 1812.

The greatest event in the history of St. Louis, except its founding, was its transfer, with that of Upper Louisiana, to the United States. The quiet tenor of colonial life had rarely been disturbed by events in the outer world, and it is doubtful if these were followed very closely or with much interest by the contented inhabitants. But they were at length suddenly awakened from the easy routine of their affairs by the glad tidings that they were about to be restored to the sovereignty of France; and fast upon the track of this news came the less welcome announcement that their city and their country had been sold to the Americans. It was an unusual spectacle that took place in St. Louis March 9 and 10, 1804, and one filled with sadness to the old inhabitants, who were mostly of French descent. The formal transfer of Upper Louisiana from Spain to France had not been made when the time arrived for its transfer to the United States. In order that this transfer might be made from *France* to the United States, according to the terms of the treaty with Napoleon, Captain Amos Stoddard, United States Army, who had been delegated to receive the country from France, was empowered by the French government to act as its agent in the transfer, which must first take place from Spain to France. The ceremony of the first transfer occurred between the hours of 11 A. M. and 12 M., March 9, 1804. The Spanish flag was lowered and the standard of France was run up in its place. The people, although conscious that the sovereignty of France was being resumed but for a moment, and simply as a necessary formality in the final transfer, nevertheless could not restrain their joy at seeing float over them once more the standard which even forty years of the mild sway of Spain had not estranged from their memory. So deep was the feeling that, when the customary hour came for lowering the flag, the people besought Captain Stoddard that it might remain

up all night. The request was granted, and the flag of France floated for twenty-four hours over the city from which it was about to be withdrawn forever. At the appointed time on the following day, March 10, 1804, the ceremony of transfer from France to the United States was enacted. The flag of the French Republic was withdrawn, and the Stars and Stripes waved for the first time in this future metropolis of the valley of the Mississippi. Thus St. Louis became perhaps the only city in history which has seen the flags of three nations float over it in token of sovereignty within the space of twenty-four hours.⁵

The growth of St. Louis during the forty years from its founding to its transfer to the United States had been very small — in fact, almost nothing. The sudden exodus of the French families to the west shore as a result of the cession of the east shore to Great Britain, gave the new town a population of over five hundred by the end of its first year's existence. In 1800, thirty-five years thereafter, the population was only 925. At the time of the cession it could not have been more than a thousand. Contrary to general expectation the effect of the cession in stimulating immigration was at first small. The War of 1812, and the resulting danger from the Western Indians, who were to some extent under British influence, together with the general stagnation of business enterprise throughout the country, held back the growth of the town for many years. The United States census of 1810 showed only 1,400 population; a local census of 1815 showed 2,000, while the next United States census, that of 1820, gave 4,000.

⁵ "The author of these sketches [History of Louisiana] was the constituted agent of the French Republic in Upper Louisiana, and in her name received possession of that province on the ninth day of March, 1804, and the next day transferred it to the United States."—Stoddard.

The interesting episode regarding the flag rests upon tradition, but of more than ordinary probability. It was related to the author by Mr. Pierre Chouteau of St. Louis, whose ancestors were eye-witnesses of the ceremonies attending the transfer.

At about this latter date St. Louis began to feel the effect of that important innovation in transportation methods — the development of the steamboat. We may place as the third great event in her history, the arrival of the first steamboat. This event took place on July 27, 1817, when the steamer *Pike* moored at the city landing. The first attempt to navigate the Missouri by steam was in 1819. The *Independence* left St. Louis for Franklin, Mo., on the 16th of May of that year, and either on that day or the next entered the mouth of the Missouri. The great importance of this new invention, by which the current of the rivers was overcome and all distances virtually shortened to one-fourth their former length, can not be overestimated. It was fully appreciated by the thoughtful men of St. Louis at the time, and filled them with a just enthusiasm at the brilliant prospects before them. "In 1817," said a writer in the *Missouri Gazette*, "less than two years ago, the first steamboat arrived at St. Louis. We hailed it as the day of small things, but the glorious consummation of all our wishes is daily arriving. . . . Who could or would have dared to conjecture that in 1819 we should have the arrival of a steamboat from Philadelphia or New York? Yet such is the fact!"

The growth of steamboat navigation on all the western rivers after this period was rapid and continuous. St. Louis became a great trade center, and soon her long levees had not space enough to accommodate the boats which assembled there from every direction — from New Orleans at the south and from the falls of St. Anthony at the north; from the Alleghenies in the east and the Rockies in the west, and even from the distant cities of the Atlantic coast. It was a wonderful development, and marks the era of real growth of the city of St. Louis.

A feature of the early life of St. Louis, which will always have an attraction for the readers of its history, is that which relates to the manners and customs of its first inhabitants. St. Louis today bears scarcely a trace of its early

character. The two or three hundred original families who were here at the time of the cession would now be well-nigh lost in the hundred thousand families to be found within the city limits, even if they had preserved unimpaired the customs and language of their fathers. But these families have themselves yielded to the current of innovation, and have drifted far from the ancient landmarks. They no longer use their native language in business affairs, and while they adhere to the religious faith of their fathers, the church no longer fills the place in their life that it once did.

The population of St. Louis at the time of the cession was extremely heterogeneous. New Orleans was the parent of the enterprise which led to its founding, but the nearly century-old towns of the Illinois — Vincennes, Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and Fort de Chartres — furnished most of the original population. Thus the two great provinces of New France, Canada and Louisiana, united in the up-building of this future great city. But the creoles of the north and south bore little enough resemblance to the same generations of Frenchmen in the motherland. The rapid progress of France in the disturbing ideas of the times, which culminated in the Revolution, was not shared by the colonists in the new world; and the settlements in the far interior of America were more like the French villages of the time of Louis XIV. than those of the period in which they actually flourished. This early French population of the Illinois was to some extent what the peasantry of French Quebec are today. They loved the quiet, listless ways of their fathers. The enterprising spirit of the Anglo-Saxon had no charms for them. Honest and punctilious in their dealings, courts and lawyers were almost unknown. Crime was very rare and jails were not found necessary. Wealth and beggary were alike absent. Ambition was not a trait of their character. Art and learning had not yet taken root. Even the commonest manufactures seem to have been lacking and the people derived their living from

the field and from the chase. But with all this apparent lack of the qualities which seem to us essential to the growth of any community, they were a happy people. They were fond of amusements, in which the celebration of church fêtes bore a prominent part. They were unselfish, hospitable and friendly in their intercourse, and a kind of democratic spirit prevailed which their change from monarchical rule to that of a republic has certainly not operated to foster. On the whole they represented a type of life over which the contemplative mind delights to linger, and it is a doubtful question whether in its extinction the world has not lost something which the present substitute does not adequately replace.

St. Louis was perhaps less noteworthy as an example of this mild and benevolent type of life than were the little villages from which she sprung. The more enterprising of the French families settled here. They did not settle down like their neighbors to the tilling of the soil, but devoted themselves more to commercial pursuits. To such a degree did they discard agriculture in favor of trade that they were compelled to purchase their subsistence to some extent from the neighboring towns ; and hence the origin of the soubriquet *Pain Court* (short of bread) which her neighbors used to fling at her. There was not the strict propriety in this nickname, however, that there was in *Vide Poche* (empty pocket) and *Misère* (wretchedness) with which she was wont to taunt her sisters in return.

In addition to the French element, St. Louis at the time of the cession contained representatives of other races and nationalities. There were numbers of Spaniards who had come while the colony belonged to Spain. The Americans had already gained a considerable foothold, which every year served to increase. The new government brought its quota of civil officials who, with the army officers stationed there, became an important accession to the town. Then there was a floating population composed of the voyageurs and adventurers who were constantly going to and returning

from the wilderness. A considerable element of negro population in the status of slavery existed, and the sight of Indians in the streets of the village was never wanting. Add to these elements the very considerable contingent of respectable visitors who came and remained long enough to see the new country, frequently also making excursions into the interior, and we have as varied and mixed a population as can be imagined.

The great business of St. Louis in these early years was her trade with the wild regions of the far west, at this time consisting mostly in furs. St. Louis was an offspring of the fur trade and her growth for three-fourths of a century depended almost entirely upon it.⁶ Her principal merchants were all more or less concerned in it, and most of them were familiar by actual experience with life on the frontier. Pierre Chouteau, Jr., the leading mercantile genius of St. Louis, and one of the greatest in the country, made several trips up the Missouri, at one time going as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone. Manuel Lisa spent a large part of his time in actual life in the wilderness. General Ashley spent much time on the upper Missouri and beyond the mountains on Green river and in the Salt Lake basin. Sublette and Campbell were both trained mountain men. It was in these remote fields that the foundations of great fortunes were laid, and that the substantial business character of St. Louis began its development.⁷

It is always a pleasing recreation of the fancy to trace the changes which time works in great cities, particularly where

⁶ For fifteen years before the cession the annual value of the St. Louis fur trade is said by one authority (Thomas Allen) to have been \$200,000; but this was probably an exaggeration.

⁷ It is a matter of much interest, and one that few residents of St. Louis are cognizant of, that the supremacy which their city held as a fur market in its early days she holds in an even greater degree today; and it will even more surprise many to know that the magnitude of the St. Louis fur trade is now actually larger than in the years when the great fur companies were exploiting those virgin regions where the beaver had never been disturbed by man. The character of the trade has changed somewhat, but its volume is as great as it ever was.

those changes are so rapid and extensive as they are in most American cities. St. Louis was built, and long remained, "under the hill"; that is, it was on the first bottom or terrace immediately on the bank of the river where the levee, Main street and Second street now are. This terrace led to an abrupt limestone bluff facing the river, which has now been wholly graded down and replaced by a well-paved levee of gradual slope. It was very many years before the city climbed the hill at all. It was mostly located along one street, *La Rue Principale* (also called *La Rue Royale*), the present Main street. Second street was called *La Rue de l'Eglise*, or Church street, because it ran in front of the block where the old cathedral and church buildings stood. Third street was called *La Rue des Granges*, or Barn street, while Fourth street had not come into existence. The cross streets likewise had French names, as for example, *La Rue de la Tour* (Tower street) the present Walnut, which extended back from the river to the fort and tower on the hill where Fourth street now intersects Walnut.

The defenses which were constructed after the "affair of 1780" lay mainly on the hill. The line started from the river at the foot of the present Franklin avenue and extended back to the bastion at the intersection of Franklin and Third. It then ran in nearly a straight line to the fort and tower between Fourth and Fifth at the crossing of Walnut. Thence it extended nearly parallel to the river to a point in Third street near Lombard, where was located in 1797 a blockhouse on the banks of Mill creek. From the blockhouse it ran directly to the river. On or near this defensive line were four stone towers.

Mill creek, *La Petite Rivière*, occupied the valley where the railroads of St. Louis now enter and leave the city. Its source, says Brackenridge, was about "three miles from town among a few tall oaks," where it took its rise in "four or five silver fountains." At an early day a dam was thrown across the valley and a considerable pond was thus created near by the present site of the Union Station. It

was long used to furnish power to a flour mill, and was a favorite resort until the city overgrew it.

The extensive plateau stretching back in gentle undulations and culminating in the ridge along which Grand avenue now runs, reaching far to the northward, was called *La Grande Prairie*. Beyond this extended the broad area of rolling timbered ground, full of the beauty of luxuriant foliage, and presenting a picture which the modern St. Louisian may still behold in the undisturbed topography of Forest Park.

Such was the St. Louis of our ancestors. How different it is today! Approaching from the east shore of the river, the visitor crosses on one of the world's greatest bridges and sees below him to right and left the broad levee and row of low buildings where the ancient village was built. Suddenly he is lost in darkness, for the train enters a tunnel through the "hill" and does not emerge until it reaches the valley of *La Petite Rivière*. But the little creek and its ancient pond and mill are no longer to be seen. In their place lie the innumerable tracks and the yards pertaining to the railroads which center in the metropolis of the Mississippi valley and terminate in one of the finest railroad stations in the world. Beneath the surface of the ground, and in place of the former stream, lies a mammoth sewer through which a hundred *petites rivières* might flow.

Just on the summit of the "hill," near where the old fort used to stand, is the business center of St. Louis. Many a building now rises in that vicinity which alone represents more wealth than the entire village possessed in 1804. Far up and down the river for a distance of many miles the uninterrupted succession of buildings extends. To the westward over the "Grande Prairie" it stretches from six to ten miles, and the *élite* of the city now dwell where were only fields and woods when St. Louis became an American city. All over this immense area an intricate system of mains and pipes carries the supply of water and light for half a million people, while in every direction powerful electric cars of

modern creation bear to and fro an active and prosperous population.

It would be an endless task to pursue this comparison into all the details, even of interest and importance, which readily suggest themselves. For St. Louis is a prophecy fulfilled, and could Laclede but return for a moment into her midst, with what pride might he not recall his enthusiastic prediction that here should yet stand "one of the finest cities of America"!

CHAPTER IV.

EXPEDITIONS OF 1807.

Manuel Lisa — Lisa, Menard, Morrison and Company — Drouillard kills Bissonnette — Expedition meets John Colter — Lisa's skill with the Indians — Passage of the Aricara villages — Experience with the Assiniboines — Lisa builds a post in the Crow country — Result of year's trade — Mandan chief Big White — Preparations for chief's return home — Stopped by the Aricaras — Battle with the Aricaras — Failure of the expedition.

FOUNDING OF FORT LISA.

BEGINNING with the close of the government explorations in 1806, the narrative portion of the present work takes up the thread of events with the following year, when for the first time an attempt was made to organize an extensive trade in the newly discovered regions around the sources of the Missouri.

The Spanish régime of forty years in Upper Louisiana gave to the fur trade but one prominent name of that nationality. This was Manuel Lisa. In boldness of enterprise, persistency of purpose, and in restless energy, he was a fair representative of the Spaniard of the days of Cortez. He was a man of great ability, a masterly judge of men, thoroughly experienced in the Indian trade and native customs, intensely active in his work, yet withal a perfect enigma of character which his contemporaries were never able to solve. Although he never seems to have commanded the warm support and confidence of his associates, still so fully were his abilities recognized that he was selected to command in the field nearly every expedition sent out by the St. Louis companies of which he was a member.¹

¹ A careful biographical sketch of this distinguished representative of the early St. Louis fur trade will be found in the following chapter.

Lisa was quick to grasp the importance of the information brought back by Lewis and Clark concerning the resources of the countries traversed by these explorers, and in his characteristic way he at once set about to reap his share of its advantages. He formed an association with William Morrison of Kaskaskia, Ill., an experienced and successful trader, and Pierre Menard of the same town who for many years was connected with one or another of the St. Louis companies. Careful preparations were made to send an expedition under Lisa to the upper rivers the following spring, with a view of establishing posts among those distant tribes who had not yet been brought into relations with American traders. It was a venture of no little hazard for the destination was more than two thousand miles away, among tribes whose friendship was at least doubtful, and a goodly portion of the route lay through the country of other tribes already well known for their treacherous and desperate character. To a less courageous spirit than that of Lisa the obstacles would have seemed too great.

The expedition left St. Louis in the spring of 1807.² The merchandise destined for barter with the Indians was carried on a keelboat and the progress of the expedition was limited to the slow rate at which this boat could be dragged up the winding course of one of the most troublesome navigable streams in the world.

Early in the journey an incident occurred which illustrates some of the harder features of the fur trade. Lisa had with him as his right hand man, George Drouillard,³ who had been an interpreter and hunter with Lewis and

²The data for the history of this expedition are less complete than could be wished. The *Louisiana Gazette*, the first newspaper of St. Louis, and now one of our best authorities upon those early times, was not established until 1808. There are no letters or documents extant bearing upon the enterprise. Our main authorities are Brackenridge, who received an account of the expedition direct from Lisa, and Thomas Biddle, who wrote from personal knowledge of the work of the fur traders in the early years of the century.

³"A man of much merit, . . . peculiarly useful from his knowl-

Clark and had now associated himself with the first trading expedition to the regions he had visited. At the mouth of the Osage river Antoine Bissonette, one of the engagés, deserted. Lisa ordered a search for him and commanded that he be brought back dead or alive. Drouillard overtook and shot him, wounding him severely. Lisa put the wounded man in a boat and sent him back to St. Charles, doing all that was possible for his comfort ; but he died on the way. When Lisa and Drouillard returned the following year, 1808, Drouillard was tried for murder before J. B. Lucas, presiding judge, and Auguste Chouteau, associate. The jury found him not guilty.

The passage of the mouth of the Platte was marked on the present occasion by an event of more importance than the enactment of the good-natured jokes which worldwide maritime custom inflicts upon those who for the first time cross the "line" from one hemisphere to the other.⁴ A boat with a solitary passenger, a white man, was descried descending the river. Such a sight, at this early date, was most unusual, and the members of the expedition were eager to learn who it might be. By good fortune it proved to be the very man of all others whom Lisa, had he been permitted to choose, would have wished to meet. It was John Colter, one of Lewis and Clark's men, who had crossed to the Pacific with those officers, and on his way back the following year had stopped to hunt and trap upon the upper tributaries of the Missouri. He was fresh from the very country which Lisa intended to visit, and that sagacious leader, it may be safely assumed, omitted no inducement which might secure to his party so valuable an acquisition. Colter agreed to return, and, abandoning his own little craft, turned his face for the third time toward the sources of the

edge of the common language of gesticulation and his uncommon skill as a hunter and woodsman." Lewis and Clark.

Lisa's expedition was commonly mentioned at the time as that of Lisa and Drouillard.

⁴ See Part V., chapter III., description of the Platte river.

Missouri. It was now over three years since he had left the frontiers of civilization.

The danger from hostile Indians to those early expeditions up the Missouri was a very formidable one. Above the friendly tribe of the Omahas, who dwelt not far from the mouth of the Platte, the navigator had to pass the country of six or seven tribes who might prove hostile or friendly according as circumstances over which he had no control might turn. It was a very rare thing for a keelboat to run the entire gauntlet unmolested, while in many instances disastrous conflicts were precipitated. The channel of the river, so capricious and shifting, often ran close to the shore, and placed a boat party in frequent jeopardy, if not absolutely at the mercy of the Indians. A leader of great experience, full of nerve and tact, and of that scarcely less valuable quality described by the word "bluff," was indispensable in these delicate emergencies. The lives of the party frequently hung as upon a thread which the slightest maladroitness or weakness would break. Defects of leadership cost many a life on the hostile shores of the Missouri.

But Lisa was as far master of the art of conciliating the good will of the Indians as was any trader that ever ascended the river. He knew when to be gentle and when severe, and could adroitly mingle with his protestations of friendship demonstrations of ability to defend himself. While smoking the pipe of peace he did not conceal the muskets of his followers, nor the more formidable swivels upon the boat. He knew the indispensable function of presents, and he was never niggardly in this respect where parsimony might mean ruin. In short he understood all the secret springs which actuate the savage mind, and with marvelous dexterity he played them so as always to avert catastrophe. His enemies accused him of going beyond the legitimate field of diplomacy and of warding off danger from his own head by directing it upon those of competing traders. Be that as it may, he never was caught in an Indian snare and never personally had serious difficulty with the savages.

On the present occasion Lisa passed through the country of the Sioux without trouble, but was stopped by that most treacherous of the Missouri tribes, the Aricaras. He found between two and three hundred warriors awaiting his approach, for news always traveled among these Indians faster than boats ascended the river. They evidently meant trouble, and probably intended to prevent Lisa's further advance. They fired a volley across his bow at the place where they had decided that he should land. There was no way to ignore their imperious command, and Lisa put to shore. Immediately upon touching the beach he ordered that no Indians should get in his boat, and the chief stationed a guard to keep off the crowd. The women then appeared with bags of corn with which to open trade ; but an Indian rushed forward and cut the bags with his knife, whereupon the women took to flight. Whether this was a premeditated signal for a general onslaught is not clear, but if so, the purpose was foiled by Lisa's watchfulness and preparation. They had failed to throw him off his guard. Instantly calling his men to arms and training his two swivels upon the shore, he gave such evidence of a purpose to open fire immediately that the Indians retreated in confusion. The chiefs then came forward holding their pipes before them in token of pacific intentions. Lisa permitted them to approach and they apologized for the incident, characteristically throwing the blame of it upon some irresponsible person who they said was a "bad man." Lisa accepted this hollow explanation without being in the least deceived by it. He quickly finished his business at the villages and resumed his voyage.⁵

Further difficulty was encountered among the Mandans — a very unusual circumstance, for these Indians were nearly always friendly to the whites — but Lisa's skillful management again carried his party safely through. With-

⁵ We shall presently see how different an interpretation was placed upon Lisa's action at the Aricara village by a party who followed him up the river.

out the least trepidation he left the boats and alone passed through the entire line of villages, keeping the Indians back from the river until the boats were safely past. He probably left a small outfit of goods at this point.

Some distance above the Mandan villages an immense band, numbering four or five thousand Indians, belonging to the wandering Assiniboine tribes, was encountered. Here Lisa thought it expedient to adopt a bolder policy and terrorize the Indians before actually coming in contact with them. He caused his swivels to be heavily loaded and every man to prepare his musket as if about to go into battle. Having completed his preparations he steered across the river and made directly for the place where the Indians were collected on the bank. When he had arrived within a hundred yards he ordered his swivels and musketry to be discharged, taking care, however, to aim where the projectiles could do no harm. The Indians were appalled at the sight and sound and fell over each other in their panic to get to the hills for safety. A few of the chiefs and warriors remained and asked to smoke the pipe of peace. The usual ceremonies were gone through with, presents were given, and protestations of friendship were exchanged, after which the little party, thankful for another escape, pursued their perilous way up the river.

Lisa mentions no other encounters with the Indians upon this trip. He steadily kept on his way up the Missouri until he reached the mouth of the Yellowstone, where later was to stand one of the greatest of the fur-trading establishments, and then ascended the latter stream until he reached the mouth of its principal tributary, the Bighorn river. Here Lisa stopped and prepared to commence his trading operations. But he had made a false move in ascending the Yellowstone instead of the Missouri, considering that one of his chief purposes was to open a trade with the Blackfoot Indians. He was now in the heart of the territory of the inveterate foes of that tribe, the Crow nation. Whatever might be his real intentions, this act of going to the Crows

to build his post could not but make the jealous Blackfeet suspect that he was in league with their enemies. Lisa probably did not realize the far-reaching consequences of this act at the time and very likely ascended the Yellowstone on the advice of Colter, who had found it a good fur country and who had had little occasion to observe the political situation of the various tribes.

Be this as it may, Lisa halted in the heart of the Crow territory at the mouth of the Bighorn river, and commenced his post at the junction of the two streams on the right bank of each. The post has since been variously known as Fort Lisa, Fort Manuel, and Manuel's Fort. No relic of it has survived and the precise spot where it stood is unknown, but to it belongs the honor of being the first American trading post established on the upper rivers and the first building erected within the limits of the present state of Montana.

Of Lisa's operations during the following winter we know nothing except as they are connected with the adventures of John Colter.⁶ It is known that he made a strong effort to open up relations with both the Crows and Blackfeet. With the Crows he was successful, but not so with the others. The outcome of the year's trade, however, was evidently satisfactory, and Lisa returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1808 elated with his success. The glowing accounts brought back by him bore fruit in the more pretentious company which continued his work in the following year.

ATTEMPTED RETURN OF THE MANDAN CHIEF.

When Lewis and Clark arrived at the Mandan villages on their way back from the Pacific in 1806, they persuaded the Mandan chief Shahaka, more commonly called Gros Blanc, or Big White, to accompany them to St. Louis with

⁶ Colter's connection with this expedition has won for the intrepid hunter a permanent place in the history of the west. So important were his adventures, even apart from the objects of Lisa's expedition, that their consideration has been made the subject of separate treatment. See Part IV., Chapter X.

a view of making a visit to President Jefferson. One of the conditions of this arrangement was that the chief should be safely escorted back to his nation when the contemplated visit was over. Accordingly in the following summer the United States took measures to carry out its agreement and an expedition was organized for the purpose.⁷

The chief's party consisted of himself and his interpreter, Rene Jesseume — with their wives and one child each. The escort consisted of two non-commissioned officers and eleven privates under the command of Ensign Nathaniel Pryor who, as a sergeant, had accompanied the expedition of Lewis and Clark. There had but recently come to St. Louis a deputation of Sioux Indians consisting of eighteen men and women and six children accompanied by William Dorion. It was arranged that they should return at the same time, but they were provided with a separate escort of soldiers commanded by Lieutenant Joseph Kimball. There also ascended the river at this time two trading parties, one for the Mandan trade, consisting of thirty-two men under the direction of Pierre Chouteau, and the other of ten men destined for the Sioux trade led by "young Dorion," presumably a son of the interpreter who was for a time with the Lewis and Clark expedition. There were, besides, one hunter, three hired boatmen, and a second interpreter. The total strength of the joint party, including the officers but omitting the Indians, was seventy-two men. Including the Indians the number was ninety-five. The whole party were to proceed together as far as to the Sioux country, whence Ensign Pryor's party with that of Pierre Chouteau would continue on to the Mandans.

The departure from St. Louis took place late in May, 1807. The expedition proceeded prosperously, although very slowly, passing all the lower Sioux bands in safety. Here Kimball's and Dorion's parties left the expedition,

⁷ The data for this expedition I have mainly found in four letters by General William Clark and Nathaniel Pryor. These were edited by Dr. Elliott Coues and published in *Annals of Iowa*, 1895, pp. 613-620.

which now, reduced to about fifty men, continued the journey and reached the lower Aricara village at 9 A. M., September 9th. The Indians of this village fired several guns in the direction of the boats. Dorion, the interpreter, asked what was the matter and they replied by inviting the party to come on shore and obtain a supply of provisions. The hospitable treatment which Lewis and Clark had received from these same Indians the year before threw the party off their guard and the boats were ordered to land. Here it was learned that the Aricaras and Mandans were at war with each other and that several of the upper Sioux bands were allied with the Aricaras and were present in the village.

There now came on board a Mandan woman who had been captive among the Aricaras for several years, and who imparted some interesting and important information which would probably not otherwise have been found out. It appears that Mr. Frederick Bates, who had given Manuel Lisa his license to trade on the upper river, visited St. Charles as he was about to start and obtained a promise from him to wait and accompany the party escorting the Mandan chief. Lisa, with his characteristic facility for doing what he deemed best for his own interests regardless of promises, went on alone. According to the story of the Mandan woman, when he found the Aricaras disposed to stop him, he told them that a large party with the Mandan chief would soon arrive, and after giving them a considerable part of his goods, including some guns and ammunition, he was allowed to proceed. The Indians determined to kill him on his return, but let him pass on for the present lest rumors of their acts and intentions might reach the parties below,^s and cause them to turn back.

^s Lisa's account of this affair, as related by Brackenridge, has already been given. Pryor and Chouteau were led to believe that Lisa had secured his own passport through these tribes at their expense. How far their suspicions were true cannot be said. It was not the only charge of this kind against Manuel Lisa, but it is a singular fact that his various acts of alleged bad faith, such as that here related, come

This fortunate interview acquainted Ensign Pryor with the true situation. He ordered the Mandan chief to barricade himself in his cabin and prepared his men for action. After considerable parleying and speech-making, in which Ensign Pryor explained the purpose of his journey, and after presenting a medal to one of the chiefs, the party left the Indians at the lower village in no good humor and proceeded to the upper village. The two interpreters, Dorion and Jesseaume, went by land through the villages. The Indians being clearly bent on mischief, Pryor determined to land, for the double purpose of taking his interpreters on board and of seeing the chief of the upper village, whom he had not been able to communicate with in the village below. The Indians ordered the boats to proceed up a narrow channel near the shore, but the whites discovered the trap in time and refused to comply. They now made known their purpose to detain the boats, saying that Lisa had told them that it was the intention of the present party to remain and trade with them. They first seized the cable of Chouteau's barge, intending to attack the party in which there were no soldiers, and motioned to Pryor to go on. This Pryor refused to do, but seeing the desperate state of affairs, he urged Chouteau to offer the Indians some concession. Finally Chouteau agreed to leave with them a trader and half his goods; but the Indians, confident in their ability to capture the outfit, refused the offer.

Meanwhile the chief of the upper village came on board of Ensign Pryor's barge and demanded that the Mandan chief go on shore with him. The request was peremptorily refused. The Indians now assumed an insolent and aggressive manner. They demanded a surrender of all the arms and ammunition. The chief to whom the medal had been given threw it on the ground and one of Chouteau's men was struck down with a gun. Raising a general war-whoop they fired on the boats and on Chouteau and a few of his only from those who claim to have suffered by them. The reputable historians of the time make no mention of them, and they are evidently to be taken with much caution.

men who were on the shore, and then withdrew to a fringe of willows along the bank some fifty yards back. Ensign Pryor had prepared himself for this contingency and immediately replied with the fire of his entire force. The willows were more of a concealment than a protection and the Indians probably suffered considerably. The contest was maintained for over a quarter of an hour, but as the number of Indians was so great as to threaten destruction to his party if the fight were continued, Pryor ordered a retreat. This was in itself a difficult thing to execute, for Chouteau's barge had stuck fast on a bar, and the men were compelled to get out into the water and drag it for some distance, all the while under the fire of the Indians. At length the boats were gotten off, and floated down the current, the Indians following along the bank and maintaining the fight for upwards of an hour.

It was not until sunset that the pursuit was finally abandoned, and then only on account of the death of one of the Sioux chiefs, the very man who had been in Ensign Pryor's boat. He wore a white bandage around his head and this mark served to distinguish him among his followers with whom, to the number of about forty, he was trying to reach a projecting point which the boats must pass. He was singled out by those in the boats and instantly killed. His followers gathered around him and abandoned the pursuit of the boats which soon passed out of sight.

The losses in this conflict were three of Chouteau's men killed and seven wounded, one mortally. Three of Ensign Pryor's party were wounded, including the interpreter, Rene Jesseaume.

Ensign Pryor now proposed to the Mandan chief that they should attempt to make the rest of the distance, about three days' march, by land, going well back from the river into the prairies and thus passing around the hostile Indians. The chief would not consent on account of the wounded condition of the interpreter and the encumbrances of their wives and children. The party then returned to St. Louis.

Thus ended the first attempt to return the Mandan chief to his nation. Ensign Pryor expressed his opinion that it would require a force of not less than four hundred men to accomplish the expedition with the temper of the Indians as it then was. It was thought at the time that the hand of the British was plainly apparent in inciting the northern Indians to this and similar outrages. Whether such was the case or not may be doubted, but it was the general belief, shared even by those high in authority. The incident was the beginning of that series of outrages committed by the treacherous Aricaras upon the traders in which many white men lost their lives during the next twenty years.⁹

⁹For an account of this tribe of Indians see Part V., chapter IX.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSOURI FUR COMPANY.

MANUEL LISA, ITS FOUNDER.

Manuel Lisa—His supposed attempt in the Santa Fe trade—His journeyings—Made sub-agent—His work in the War of 1812—Becomes president of the Missouri Fur Company—His death—Magnitude of his work—His energetic nature—His enemies—His marriage—His Indian marriage—His name and language—His religion.

OF the three principal fur companies which operated from St. Louis to the westward—the Missouri Fur Company, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the American Fur Company—the first-named was the oldest, and had nearly run its course before either of the others was well established in the St. Louis trade. The history of this company is practically the history of one man, who was from the first its leading spirit, and for a large part of its history the only man of prominence connected with it. So remarkable was his life, and so strong a part did he play in the early history of the Missouri fur trade, that an extended notice of his career is an essential preliminary to a history of the company.

Manuel Lisa, Indian trader, was born of Spanish parents in New Orleans, September 8, 1772.¹ His father, Christopher Lisa, came to this country in the service of his government about the time that the Spanish took possession of Louisiana. Nothing of interest concerning the father's career nor of young Lisa's early life has come to light. It is known that the father spent the rest of his life in the Spanish

¹This is the record on Lisa's tombstone in Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis. His birthplace is generally given as in one of the West Indies.



service and that young Lisa came to St. Louis at an early date, probably not later than 1790. He had become well established in his lifelong occupation, the fur trade, before the end of the century, for one of the first notices on record concerning him is that of his securing from the Spanish government about the year 1800 the exclusive trade with the Osage Indians on the Osage river. He must have already gained some reputation and experience as a trader to be given so important a grant, for he thus displaced Pierre Chouteau, who is said to have had the privilege of the trade for upwards of twenty years.²

Our first definite knowledge of Lisa begins with the period covered by the present work. He went up the Missouri river in 1807 ; built his post at the mouth of the Bighorn ; returned in 1808 and was the moving spirit in the organization of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company in the winter of 1808-9. He ascended the river again in the spring of 1809 to his post on the Bighorn, which he transferred to the new company. He returned to St. Louis in October, 1809.

² In a letter to Lieutenant Z. M. Pike, written by General Wilkinson at St. Louis shortly after Pike's departure in 1806 on his tour of exploration to the southwest, occurs an interesting reference to some trader whose name is purposely withheld, but whom the latest editor of Pike's Journals, Dr. Elliott Coues, thinks he can identify as Manuel Lisa. Wilkinson informs Pike that this trader has on foot a scheme to carry an expedition to Santa Fe, and he warns Pike to take measures to prevent it. It is quite possible that the robust ambition of Lisa may have looked so far in search of profitable adventure. He was at this time probably in relation with William Morrison, who had tried to open communication with Santa Fe two years before, and he may now have been considering a project of this sort. Why it should have excited the umbrage of General Wilkinson, it is difficult to understand, unless it came athwart some incipient enterprise of that faithless servant of his country. There was certainly no harm in attempting to open up that line of trade which a few years later was to become an important branch of frontier commerce. The reference is of interest, both as indicating the breadth of Lisa's ambition, and showing that already he had raised up about him that swarm of enemies that harassed him the rest of his life.

In the following winter he attempted to go to Montreal on business connected with the trade, but was stopped by the embargo (*ce maudi embargau*, in his own bad French,) at Detroit and was compelled to return. In the spring of 1810 he again ascended the river, returning to St. Louis in the fall and remaining there the following winter. In April, 1811, he set out again for the upper river in the hope of learning what had become of Major Andrew Henry, and also for the purpose of bringing down the returns of the previous winter and of ascertaining the state of the company's property; for this was the last year of the term fixed for the duration of the company and a dissolution or reorganization was to take place in the following winter. This was the celebrated trip on which Lisa made such herculean efforts to overtake Wilson Price Hunt, who was in charge of the overland Astorian party. Lisa went as far as to his post at the Mandans but soon returned to the Aricara villages, where he remained until Henry came down the river. He went back to St. Louis in October.

The St. Louis Missouri Fur Company was reorganized during the winter of 1811-12, some of the members dropping out and Lisa becoming relatively a more important personage in the concern than before. He went up the river with two barges which left St. Louis May 2 and May 6, 1812, and remained at his Mandan post until the following spring. He arrived at St. Louis with the winter's trade June 1, 1813. During his absence war had broken out between the United States and Great Britain and new conditions had arisen in the upper Missouri trade. It was known that British agents were, or soon would be, active among the upper Missouri tribes, and that there might soon be precipitated upon the settlements the horrors of a frontier war. No man had more influence with these Indians than Lisa, and to him was assigned the task of endeavoring to hold them fast to the interests of the United States. He was made sub-agent for all the Missouri tribes above the Kansas, and set out again for the upper rivers in August, 1814. It is quite



possible that Lisa went up to the Omaha nation during the previous year, but no record of such a trip has come to us. He now went up to Fort Lisa, an establishment which he had built a little above the present site of Omaha, Nebraska, and remained there until the spring of 1815. He succeeded beyond all expectations in controlling the Indians. He not only organized war expeditions against some of the tribes on the Mississippi who were allies of the British, but he secured pledges of friendship from nearly all the Missouri tribes, and went down to St. Louis in the spring of 1815 with forty-three chiefs and head men authorized to make treaties of friendship and alliance with the United States. It was mainly through his efforts that the upper Missouri tribes were prevented from going over to the British, and the government of the United States duly recognized the fact.³

Lisa's movements during the two years after the war are not very certain, but it is known that he wintered at Fort Lisa each year. In 1817 he resigned his commission as sub-agent in a letter,⁴ which is well worth perusal, so true is it to the character of the man as shown in the record of his work. He now continued his regular trade, wintering at Fort Lisa and spending about two months of the summer at St. Louis. The Missouri Fur Company underwent various changes, Lisa becoming more dominant in its councils, and finally its president. He also seems to have been general agent or manager of the affairs of the firm of Cabanne and Company on the Missouri until he was deprived of the trust in February, 1819, because he had come down the river earlier than he was authorized to by the terms of his contract. But he doubtless came down from necessity of defending his interests against his ubiquitous enemies.

³ *American State Papers*, Vol. II., Indian Affairs, p. 76: "Manuel Lisa, salary, \$548; agent for the tribes of the Missouri above the Kansas; greater part of his time with these tribes; resides in St. Louis; has been of great service in preventing British influence the last year by sending large parties to war."

⁴ See Appendix B.

In 1819 the famous Yellowstone expedition went up the river and made its grand encampment for 1819-20 near Lisa's fort. Lisa left no stone unturned to cultivate the good will of his new neighbors and evidently rendered them many friendly offices. His wife, whom he had married but a year before, went up to his establishment and remained during the winter.

Lisa returned to St. Louis in April, 1820, in good health. This was his last voyage on the Missouri. About August 1st he was seized with a serious illness, the nature of which is not now known, and he died on the 12th of August at the Sulphur Springs some distance southwest of the old city, but now within its limits.

Thus closed the career of the most active and indefatigable trader that St. Louis ever produced. A faint idea of the prodigious labors that were crowded into his life may be gleaned from the fact that during its last thirteen years he ascended and descended the Missouri river twelve times, and possibly thirteen, if his movements in 1813-14 were more fully known. These journeys were never less than 670 miles long, the distance to Fort Lisa. Several trips were made to the Mandan establishments, about fifteen hundred miles, while two trips were made to the mouth of the Bighorn, about two thousand miles. In all he could not have traveled less than twenty-six thousand miles by river, or a total distance greater than the circumference of the earth. With a fair allowance for speed it will result that he must have spent not less than the equivalent of three solid years battling against the intractable Missouri or gliding swiftly with its downward current. Of the twelve winters included in the above period he probably spent seven, and possibly eight, in the wilderness.

Such are some of the more tangible facts that attest the extraordinary energy of this noted trader. He was beyond comparison the ablest of the traders so far as the actual conduct of an enterprise was concerned, and wherever he alone had control, and was not hampered by the councils

of others, he generally succeeded. He once said, in explaining his successes: "I put into my operations great activity. I go a great distance while some are considering whether they will start today or tomorrow." Privation, hardship, incessant toil, were his constant portion. He could put his hand to the oar, if necessary, among his voyageurs, lead them in their songs, and cheer them to exertions which would have otherwise been unendurable. In brief he was a man who never shrank from any toil that occasion demanded, and a finer example of persistent effort throughout a lifetime can scarcely be pointed out.

It was but natural that so vigorous and aggressive a nature should have made enemies, but it is not easy to see why these should have been so numerous and vindictive. The leading characteristic of Lisa's life, next to those just noted, was the constant state of embroilment with others in which he lived. Even La Salle, whose entire career was beset by jealous enemies, could scarcely have surpassed Manuel Lisa in this regard. He was always at odds with some one who was jealous of his success or felt aggrieved at his interference with his own schemes. Every letter written by Lisa, which has come to notice in these studies, is mainly taken up in anxious complaints of the unceasing efforts of his enemies to ruin him. It is very difficult at this time, when all who knew him personally are dead, to fathom the cause of this remarkable feature of Lisa's career. All contemporary references to him are exceedingly flattering, and he evidently stood high in the esteem of his fellows. The primary cause of his incessant troubles seems to have been jealousy of his success as a trader. It will be noted that down to the day of his death no other trader succeeded in securing a foothold in the upper Missouri trade. There is also some evidence, although it all came from his enemies, that he was unscrupulous in the means he employed to promote his own interests. If this be so, the only difference between him and his detractors is that he was too sharp for them and succeeded where they failed. His methods certainly were

as pure as theirs, and their wrath was kindled not so much on account of them as at their invariable success. There is no record of his ever having come out second best in a contest with his competitors.

He was accused in 1807 of having prevailed upon the Aricaras, in consideration of letting his expedition pass, to stop Lieutenant Pryor who was conducting to his home the Mandan chief. The evidence, however, is insufficient. Lisa could have had no motive for such an act, for Pryor's expedition was not in the trade, and could do Lisa no harm. Moreover it would have been madness on his part to antagonize a government expedition and thus perhaps cause his own trading license to be canceled. Crooks and McLellan brought a similar accusation against him in 1810, but no evidence of its truth has ever come to light.

So in every instance there is present the animus of jealousy on the part of rival traders, and such evidence must be taken with much allowance. That Lisa was always right in these matters, that he hesitated to resort to unscrupulous measures in resisting those of an enemy, is not to be supposed. His code was the code of the wilderness. He practiced it with unflinching severity, and his superior skill was chiefly what roused the ire of his less expert rivals.⁵

Thus his life was not only one of physical activity, but

⁵ The following letter is a fair example of the bitter feeling which was entertained toward Lisa by his St. Louis rivals. It is from B. Berthold to Pierre Chouteau, and is dated August 20, 1819.

"Mon cher Associé :

"Par Mr. Dent j'apprend que Manuel s'est décidé à amener sa femme [to Fort Lisa], afin d'attirer chez lui la protection des officiers, vu qu'on lui a rapporté que l'on comptait surveiller sa conduite. Il se fait fort de si bien les traiter, qu'il espère en tirer de grands avantages.

" Dans le cas où vous seriez décidé à y faire une visite, je crois que de bonnes lettres d'introduction pour les officiers supérieures pourraient être de quelque utilité.

"L'escargot a toujours été très vanteur, et d'avance a prétendu prédire ce qu'il ferait. Cette année il prétend se consolider à jamais. Je crois pour ma part, que quant à lui même, il est le moins capable de tous les traiteurs."

mental unrest and turmoil as well — a life not at all exemplified in his death, if we may accept the simple record in the diary of his father-in-law, Stephen Hempstead, who was present at his death bed, that “he died without distressing struggles.”

Lisa was twice married among his own people and had besides a wife among the Omaha nation. Of his first wife almost nothing is known. There was a tradition that she had been taken prisoner by the Indians and was held by them until General Harrison ransomed her, when Lisa, pitying her condition, married her. Her name, as given on deeds by her mark was Mary Charles or Polly Charles. She died in the autumn of 1817. She had three children. The eldest, Sally, died February 22, 1809. The second, Manuel, was born October 12, 1809, and died June 29, 1826, surviving his father six years. The third died in infancy, nearly a year after its mother's death.

Lisa's second matrimonial alliance was with the well-known Hempstead family. He married Mary Hempstead Keeney, widow of John Keeney, and daughter of Stephen Hempstead, August 5, 1818. This marriage was a very happy one and there are still extant two letters of Lisa written to his wife which evince the most tender affection for her. He was even heard to say that he had never before known what domestic happiness was. But this happiness had its drawbacks, though fortunately not of a serious nature. Lisa could not speak either English or French distinctly and his wife could not speak French or Spanish. Their difficulties in making each other understood were a source of much mirth to the family. Mrs. Lisa spent the winter of 1819-20 at Fort Lisa, and was probably the first white woman to ascend the Missouri so far. She was a most lovable and saintly woman, revered by all who knew her. She was always known, after her marriage with Lisa, as Aunt Manuel. She survived her husband nearly fifty years in widowhood, and died at Galena, Illinois, September 3, 1869, at the age of eighty-seven.

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An interesting and pathetic romance is connected with Lisa's Indian courtship and marriage. On his part the alliance was made purely from motives of policy the better to ingratiate himself in the good will of the Omaha tribe, and to strengthen himself against the influence of rival traders. He sought the hand of a beautiful daughter of one of the principal families of the nation and after the usual negotiations with the parents the marriage was consummated with due ceremony. Lisa, with honorable frankness, made known the fact that he was already married, but this, in Indian custom, was not considered a bar to further marriage. The alliance took place in 1814. In the spring of 1815 Lisa, as was his wont, went down to St. Louis with the winter's trade and returned during the autumn. His Indian wife, who does not appear at first to have been very enthusiastic over the turn in her fortunes, fell deeply in love with Lisa before his return, perhaps in consequence of the birth of a daughter, a fine child, which occurred during Lisa's absence. She went to the river daily with her child and watched for the boat which should bring back the husband and father. Great was her joy when he arrived and she presented him with their first born, and the father himself seems to have been pleased with his new acquisition. Upon his return in the fall of 1816 his Indian wife presented him with another child, a son. When Lisa was preparing for his St. Louis trip in the summer of 1817, he wanted to take the first child, which he had named Rosalie, with him. The mother reluctantly consented, but seemed to realize that she should see it no more, and burst into the most frantic demonstrations of grief when father and child disappeared.

In the fall of 1817 Lisa's first wife died, and after his return from his post in the following summer, he married Mrs. Keeney. When he took her to Fort Lisa in the fall of 1819 he sent word to have his Indian wife removed from the immediate vicinity of the post. She could not remain away, however, and after a time came to the post with some of her friends and sent their little son, who had been named Ray-

mond, to Lisa. Peril had further endeared the child to her, for during Lisa's absence both mother and child had narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Sioux. While one day engaged with other squaws tilling the soil, the little baby strapped to its cradle board reclining against a tree, the Sioux were seen approaching. All fled in terror, but the mother, quickly remembering that she had forgotten the child, rushed back in the very face of the Sioux, seized her precious burden and fled for the post. When she reached the fence around the post the Sioux were almost upon her, and she threw the board, baby and all, with her full strength to the other side. Mother and child escaped, although four of their companions were slain. Lisa received the child affectionately and after giving the mother some presents bade her go to her people.

When Lisa was preparing to depart for St. Louis in the spring of 1820 he sent for his Indian wife and told her that he intended to take the remaining child to St. Louis to be reared and educated there. The mother was so overpowered with grief that she seized the child, ran to the river, and getting quickly into a boat, rowed to the other side, where she remained out of doors all night. The next morning, she went back, gave the child to Lisa, saying that she knew it would be better off where he wished to take it, but begged that he would take her also. She would not trouble him but would live in any nook or corner that he might provide for her, if only she could be permitted now and then to see her children. But Lisa was inflexible. He offered her rich presents and bade her return to her people, telling her that their relation to each other could no longer continue. The wretched woman burst into a paroxysm of grief and taunted Lisa with faithlessness, saying that their marriage was for life and could not be broken off ; that Lisa had ruined her opportunities for marriage among her own people, and now was about to desert her and carry away her children. But these entreaties, whatever weight they may have had with Lisa, could not prevail. What she asked was

impossible and it was Lisa's desire to benefit the children that alone made him wish to take them with him. He was now reaping the sad consequences of a step taken solely for purposes of policy. He persisted in his decision and would have carried it into effect had not the Indian Agent interfered and forbidden him to take the child from its mother.⁶

Lisa died soon after, and in his will directed his executor to provide for the education of these two children, and left two thousand dollars each for them when they should become of age. Whether these benevolent provisions were ever carried out does not appear, nor what became of the two children. As all of Lisa's other children died without issue, it is through the children of his Indian wife, if at all, that the blood of their distinguished parent has found a direct descent to posterity.

Lisa's name once appears, in an official document, as Manuei de Lisa, but he always wrote it Manuel Lisa. He was generally known by his first name, Manuel, or Mr. Manuel, and many did not know him by any other. He is said to have followed the sea when young and thence to have gained the title of captain by which he was frequently called. His name was at one time identified with many geographical features of the upper country, but now survives in one or two only. His signature may be seen opposite page 139. There is still in existence a portrait of Lisa in oil, now in possession of Mrs. Nathan Corwith, of Highland Park, Illinois.

Lisa's native tongue was Spanish, and he never acquired a fluent or correct use of either French or English. Letters in his own handwriting in either language are barbarously written. That given in the Appendix is taken from the *Missouri Gazette* and was edited pretty thoroughly by some friend or acquaintance before publication ; but the force and spirit of the composition clearly stamp it a genuine product of Lisa's vigorous mind.

⁶ This woman's name was Mitain, and she was seen by Maximilian, 1833.

Lisa was a Catholic, but evidently not a very punctilious follower of his church. He was married (the second time) by a Presbyterian clergyman, the well-known Salmon Giddings, to a daughter of a staunch member of the same church. His funeral services were conducted in the Catholic church, but he was buried in the private burying ground of the Hempsteads, now in the Protestant Bellefontaine cemetery.

The Lisa monument is a very satisfactory shaft and is still in a state of perfect preservation. The record of his life is on the southwest face over the word LISA, and that of his wife on the southeast face over the words AUNT MANUEL. There are also records of other members of the family on the remaining faces.

How much property Lisa left is not known, but his affairs were certainly much involved at the time of his death and the unencumbered residue of the estate was probably not large.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSOURI FUR COMPANY. SKETCH OF ITS VARIED CAREER.

The first association — Contract for return of Mandan chief — Expedition of 1809 — Movement to the Three Forks of the Missouri — Attack by the Blackfeet — Death of Drouillard — Position at Three Forks untenable — Henry crosses the Divide — Fort Henry abandoned — Abandonment of entire upper country — Post at Cedar Island burned — Notes from Alexander Henry — Reorganization of the company — Defects of first association — Gloomy prospects of new company — War of 1812 — Revival of the trade after the war — Death of Lisa — Joshua Pilcher succeeds Lisa — Trade carried to upper Yellowstone — Jones and Immel sent to Three Forks — Meeting with the Blackfeet — Ambushed by the Blackfeet — Jones and Immel slain — Suspicion of British intrigue — Company withdraws from the trade of the upper river — Pilcher's tour of the Hudson Bay posts — Missouri Fur Company extinct — Biographical notes.

THE return of Lisa in the summer (probably August) of 1808 and the reports brought back concerning the resources of the upper country made a deep impression upon the St. Louis traders, and led to the formation of a trading company which included nearly all the prominent business men in the city. It was incorporated under the name of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, but was generally known as the Missouri Fur Company.¹ The members of the new company in the order in which their names appear in the

¹This was a popular name for more than a quarter of a century and was applied to several different associations of St. Louis traders which succeeded each other in the early commerce of the Missouri. The first of these was formed at the suggestion of Zenon Trudeau, "governor of the western part of the Illinois," who on May 12, 1794, assembled the traders of St. Louis and advised the formation of a company not only

record, were: Benjamin Wilkinson, Pierre Chouteau, Sr., Manuel Lisa, Auguste Chouteau, Jr., Reuben Lewis, William Clark, Sylvester Labadie, all of St. Louis; Pierre Menard and William Morrison, of Kaskaskia, Illinois; Andrew Henry, of Louisiana, Missouri, and Dennis Fitz Hugh, of Louisville, Kentucky.

The articles of association prescribed in much detail the proposed methods of conducting the company's business, and defined the duties of the several partners. Lisa and Wilkinson were designated as the factors to trade with the Indians and General Clark was made the company's agent in St. Louis. No member was permitted to trade on his private account. The term during which the various associates were to reside in the Indian country without returning to St. Louis was fixed at three years, except that those members who were permitted first to return home could do so the following year. Pierre Chouteau, Manuel Lisa, and Pierre Menard were to be the first to enjoy this privilege; Benjamin Wilkinson and Auguste Chouteau the next. The new association bought out the stock and equipments of the late firm of Lisa, Menard and Morrison and likewise purchased their post at the mouth of the Bighorn river.

An important feature of the articles relates to a contract ²

to control the trade of the Missouri, but to extend geographical and scientific knowledge as well. A company was formed accordingly, but it soon failed owing to the fraudulent conduct of one of its members.

Another firm of some prominence was founded in 1802 by Manuel Lisa, Francis M. Benoit, Gregoire Sarpy, and Charles Sanguinet. It continued only for a few years, when, in 1807, Lisa, Menard, and Morrison organized the company already described, which was soon merged with the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company.

The record of the Articles of Association of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company may still be seen in Book B, p 373, in the recorder's office in the city of St. Louis.

²There is a singular discrepancy in the dates of these two instruments. The articles of association were signed May 9th, 1809, and the contract February 24th, although the latter refers to the former as already in existence.

In Testimony whereof the parties aforesaid have hereunto to be
= Changelably set their hands and Seals, the day and Year, and place

first here written
I have stated and delivered
in presence of

the words "the brown knot from being" in the
with a hole on the second page being first
inserted, and the words "fail to be" inserted
at the same place, and the word "permit" in
the second article on the third page crossed out
the word "and charge" interlined before signing

Minister Lewis

Wm. M. Matthews

Abner Linn

Am. Clark
E. Hempstead

Am. Morrison

Ben. Nicholas

J. P. Hartman

between Governor Meriwether Lewis on the part of the United States and the members of the new company for transporting to his tribe the Mandan chief who had not yet gone home. The principal items in this interesting document were the following: The company agreed to engage one hundred and twenty-five men, of whom forty should be "Americans and expert riflemen," to constitute a body of militia of the territory of Missouri for the specific purpose of escorting the Mandan chief home, after which they were to be given their discharge. This force was to be suitably equipped with firearms of which there should be at least fifty rifles. The command of the escort was assigned to Pierre Chouteau, who had already given evidence of his determined spirit in the battle before the Aricara villages in 1807. The company was to provide suitable quarters on the boat for the chief, his wife, and child, the interpreter Jesseaume, his wife, and child, and two other interpreters. It bound itself to protect with its utmost power the chief and his party from all danger en route, and to report at once their safe arrival at the Mandan villages. It was also to transport the necessary presents to the Indians. The start from St. Louis was fixed for April 20, 1809, and might not be delayed beyond May 10th, under a penalty of three thousand dollars. The compensation agreed upon for this service was seven thousand dollars, one-half to be paid on the date of starting and the balance when a report was received of the satisfactory completion of the journey. Governor Lewis also agreed that before the departure of the expedition he would not license any other traders to ascend the Missouri higher than to the mouth of the Platte.

The Missouri Fur Company entered upon its career under the most auspicious circumstances. The *Louisiana Gazette* of March 8, 1809, referring to the new association, said: "It has every prospect of becoming a source of incalculable advantage not only to the individuals engaged but to the community at large. Their extensive prepara-

tions, and the extensive force with which they intend to ascend the Missouri, may bid defiance to any hostile force they may meet with. The streams which descend from the Rocky mountains afford the finest of hunting, and here, we learn, they intend to build their fort."

The company included the ablest traders of the west. Its field of operations embraced the whole watershed of the Missouri from the mouth of the Platte upward — a region known to abound in all the resources of the chase. Only one obstacle was feared and that was the hostility of the Indians. To meet this there was provided a force considered ample to repel any attacks, while it was hoped that a liberal extension of the trade would secure the friendship of the tribes. The capitalization of the company was not stated in the articles of association but it is understood to have been \$40,000. The company felt so confident of success, and was so determined to close the door to all but its chosen few, that it provided in one of the articles that "no person shall hereafter be permitted to become a member of this company unless by the unanimous consent of every member."

The first expedition of the company numbered about one hundred and fifty men and carried sufficient merchandise to supply five or six posts and to equip as many smaller outfits as should be found desirable. The plan was to establish several posts along the river from the Sioux to the Minnetarees, but to take the main part of the expedition to Lisa's fort on the Yellowstone. It was expected to pass the first winter in that neighborhood and then to proceed in the following spring to the Three Forks of the Missouri, where the principal establishment was to be placed.

The expedition left St. Louis in the spring of 1809³ and

³ The date of the departure is not precisely known. By the terms of the contract for the return of the Mandan chief, the escort was to set out not later than May 10, under pain of forfeiture of \$3,000. But the last ration return for the chief and his interpreters covers the period from February 1, 1809, to May 15, 1809, "the day of his departure," which would indicate that the contract time was exceeded. There is no

proceeded to its destination without serious mishap. The Sioux threatened trouble but were deterred from actual disturbance by the formidable appearance of the party. The Aricaras, who were passed September 12, were very hospitable. Doubtless this treacherous tribe understood from the strength of the party that it was expedient to put on the guise of friendship. The Mandan villages were passed September 24. Parties had been left to establish posts at Cedar Island among the Sioux, and at the Aricaras, Mandans, and Minnetarees. The main party then went on and arrived in due time, probably toward the end of October, at the mouth of the Bighorn river.

This portion of the expedition wintered in the Crow country, for it was too late in the year to establish a post at the Three Forks. A profitable trading and trapping campaign was carried on in the fall and winter, and early in the spring of 1810 a strong party, in which were at least two partners, Pierre Menard and Andrew Henry, set out for the Three Forks of the Missouri.⁴ The temper of the Blackfeet was doubtful, and the party went prepared to exploit the resources of the country by means of their own trappers in case they did not succeed in opening a trade with the Indians.

Upon the arrival of the party at the Three Forks the erection of a post was promptly begun on the neck of land between the Jefferson and Madison rivers, about two miles above their confluence. In the meanwhile the trappers were dispersed to gather the resources of this rich beaver country. Fortune at first smiled upon them most encouragingly. It was evident that they were in the midst of vir-

notice of the departure in the *Gazette*, but there is a notice of the return of messengers who were sent back from the Mandans to report the arrival of the expedition at that point. These messengers stated that the expedition arrived at its destination September 24, 101 days out from St. Louis, which would indicate June 15 as the day of departure. It is probable that the military escort set out first and that the trading expedition followed some weeks later.

⁴For an extended description of this remarkable spot see Part V., Chapter II.

gin territory unsurpassed in its wealth of beaver. The daily catch was heavy and the prospect was excellent that the company would take out from the Three Forks fully three hundred packs of beaver the first year.

In the midst of this sunshine of prosperity a black storm of disaster broke upon the unsuspecting company. It was the morning of the 12th of April and the trappers as usual had gone to examine their traps when a band of Blackfeet⁵ came down upon them with the suddenness of a lightning flash. Before the least warning could be given five of the men were killed, and all their horses, guns, ammunition, traps, and furs were stolen. Only two of the Indians are known to have been killed. This most unfortunate affair spread gloom and discouragement throughout the camp, and it was with difficulty that the men could be induced to resume their work. It was necessary to adopt a different and much more expensive system by which a large proportion of the trappers were to remain at a central camp, while those tending the traps should keep closer together.

One of the great difficulties of the situation was to open any communication with the Blackfeet whereby peace might be sought. The Indians were so intensely hostile that there seemed to be no possibility of an interview except at the rifle's mouth. To get over this difficulty Pierre Menard proposed to make a visit to the Flathead and Snake Indians with a view of inducing them to join in a war upon the Blackfeet until they could obtain a prisoner. Him they would dispatch to his people with propositions of peace which it was thought could be obtained on condition of establishing a trading post on the Missouri below the Great Falls.⁶ But before Menard could carry this ingenious

⁵ Grosventres of the Prairie. For an account of this tribe and why they were constantly confounded with the Blackfeet, see Part V., chapter IX.

⁶ Letter from Pierre Menard to Pierre Chouteau, dated Three Forks of the Missouri, April 21, 1810. This most interesting and valuable document, sole surviving relic of the fort at the Three Forks of the Missouri, is given in Appendix A.

scheme into effect, and only two days after he had written of it to St. Louis, the Blackfeet fell upon the party again. The result of this attack is not known, but it was evidently not such as to encourage Menard to remain in the country. He must have left within a month afterward, for he was back in St. Louis "a few days" before July 26, 1810.⁷

Before Menard started for St. Louis, however, another unfortunate encounter with the Blackfeet had taken place in which fell an important man for the company's service, George Drouillard, who has already been introduced in these pages. Early in May Drouillard with several Delaware Indians in the employ of the company went out to hunt, contrary to the advice of the rest of the party, who believed that Indians were prowling in the neighborhood. Their fears were quickly realized. Drouillard had not gone two miles when his party was ambushed by the Blackfeet⁸ and himself and two of his companions killed. From the appearance of the scene of this attack it was apparent that Drouillard made a desperate defense. He seems to have used his horse as a breastwork, turning him so as to shield himself constantly from the enemy. It was but a short time until the horse was killed and he himself was the next victim. A most painful feature of this affair was that it took place within ordinary hearing distance of relief, but owing to a high wind prevailing at the time, the firing was not heard.

It was now apparent that the expectations of the company were not to be realized. Many of the hunters had resolved to leave, and it was decided that Pierre Menard should accompany them and take down the furs, about thirty packs, which had so far been collected. The rest of the party under the command of Andrew Henry remained at Three Forks.

From this time on the difficulties of the hunters increased.

⁷ See the *Louisiana Gazette* of this date.

⁸ These were probably the band called the Blood Indians. See Part V., Chapter IX.

There seemed no possibility of negotiating with the Blackfeet who hung constantly in the neighborhood attacking every party over which they felt certain of having the advantage. The whole plan of operations of the company in that quarter was broken up. Trapping, which was profitable only when carried on in small detached parties, had to be suspended. Even with the utmost precaution it is said that between twenty and thirty men lost their lives. What transpired at this post during the rest of the season of 1810 we do not certainly know, except that, before the summer was over, a party of about twenty hunters met and repulsed an attack of about two hundred Blackfeet. The hunters made good their retreat with the loss of only one man, but claimed to have killed about twenty of the Indians.

The course of events during the summer made it evident that this post⁹ would have to be given up. Not wishing to retire from the country altogether, Henry abandoned the position some time during the fall of 1810, moved south across the Continental Divide, and established himself on the north fork of Snake river, which has been known since that time as Henry Fork. One account states that in crossing the mountains he lost a part of his horses at the hands of the Crows. He built a temporary post consisting of a few log houses at a point near where the village of Egin, Idaho, now stands. This was the first trading post ever built in the valley of the Columbia or west of the Continental Divide.

In their new position the little band was scarcely more fortunate than in the one they had just left. They do not seem to have been molested by the Indians, but they found almost no game. A severe winter ensued, with deep snows and heavy spring rains, and the party could scarcely find means to keep themselves alive. They were compelled to subsist mainly on horse flesh. They succeeded, however, in securing some forty packs of beaver.

⁹ For a more extended reference to this post, see list of trading posts in Appendix F.

By the time the spring of 1811 had come the party were thoroughly dispirited and could no longer be held together. They separated into groups and set out in various directions, some toward the Spanish possessions, some east over the mountains, while Henry himself resolved to abandon the post and depart with the winter's returns for the lower river. Several of these bands of hunters will reappear in the course of this narrative. Some, no doubt, never again saw the frontier, but perished in the wilderness, yet such was the capacity for self-preservation possessed by these virile and hardy adventurers that most of them sooner or later found their way back.

It is not known by which of the two rivers, the Missouri or the Yellowstone, Henry made his descent in the spring of 1811, but probably by the Yellowstone; nor what, if any, remarkable adventure he experienced. Lisa ascended the river that spring to wait for him. He visited the Mandan villages, and then went back to the Aricaras, where he remained until he was joined by Henry some time after the middle of July.¹⁰

Thus ended in failure the project upon which the company had mainly relied. In the meanwhile the post at the Bighorn had been abandoned and the company had withdrawn all its parties from above the Mandans. This, however, was not the sum of the company's disasters. In the spring of 1810 Auguste Chouteau set out for St. Louis with the intention of taking down the furs that had been collected below the Mandans. Just before he reached Cedar Island the post at that point was burned with furs estimated to be worth fifteen thousand dollars. Add to these misfortunes the fact that furs were at this time bringing but little more than half their normal market price,¹¹ and the outlook for the company was discouraging enough. But in spite of these reverses, it is stated that the company arrived at the

¹⁰ For biographical sketch of Andrew Henry see Chapter XV. of this part.

¹¹ The price of beaver was about \$2.50 per pound, as against a normal rate of \$4.00 per pound.

term of its existence without any loss and with a small profit, having saved its original capital in addition to such posts as were upon the upper rivers.¹²

Although the articles of association specified the full term of three years from March 9, 1809, as the period of the company's existence, a reorganization was effected on the 24th of January, 1812, and the property of the old company was sold on the 15th of the following month. The new com-

¹² Some interesting sidelights upon these events on the upper Missouri have come to light in the recently published journals of Alexander Henry. From them it appears that the Blackfeet robbed the whites of some beaver in 1808 and brought them to the British posts to trade. This probably refers to their attack on Colter and Potts. They undertook to repeat their tactics in 1809, but were not successful. Early in the spring of 1810 the Blackfeet were defeated by the Crows near Lisa's fort on the Yellowstone. The following extract relates to the affairs at the Three Forks in the summer of 1810: "While on a war excursion last summer these people [the Falls Indians or Gros Ventres of the Prairies] fell upon a party of Americans whom they confess that they murdered, and robbed of considerable booty in utensils, beaver skins, etc. Some of the beaver skins, I observed, were marked Valley and Jummell with different numbers—8, 15, etc. . . . The Bloods were at war on the Missouri about the same time as the Falls Indians. They also fell upon a party of Americans, murdered them all, and brought away considerable booty in goods of various kinds, such as fine cotton shirts, beaver traps, hats, knives, dirks, handkerchiefs, Russia sheeting tents, and a number of bank notes, some signed New Jersey and Trenton Banking Company. From the description the Bloods gave of the dress and behavior of one whom they murdered, he must have been an officer or trader; they said he killed two Bloods before he fell. This exasperated them, and I have reason to suppose they butchered him in a horrible manner and then ate him partly raw, and partly boiled. They said his skin was exceedingly white and tattooed from the hips to the feet."

Valley and Jummell are Vallé and Immel, who were apparently free trappers in company with the main expedition. It is possible that the officer or trader referred to was Drouillard, whose tragic death has already been noticed.

In March, 1811, some Piegans reported that they had lately seen a fort on the Yellowstone "inhabited by white people." This would indicate that Lisa's fort was not abandoned until the spring of 1811, and that Henry went that way when he left Snake river and took the garrison and property along with him.

pany was made up from the members of the old, but did not include them all. The capital was fixed at fifty thousand dollars, of which twenty-seven thousand was accepted in funds and property of the late company, and the balance was raised by subscription.

Looking back from this distance at the history of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, it is apparent that the primary cause of its failure was the top-heavy character of its organization. Capitalized at less than fifty thousand dollars, it embraced every trader of distinction in St. Louis, all of whom bore an active part in the administration of affairs either at home or in the field. It was not to be expected that such an arrangement could be as effective as if a single individual had controlled its management. Another error on the part of the St. Louis traders was their unwillingness to permit Mr. Astor to have any share in their business. They excluded the very man who would have been able to carry them through their initial misfortunes to ultimate success. The great confidence of the St. Louis merchants, and their determination to keep this new and rich field of enterprise to themselves, is well attested by the fact that the original company was a kind of close corporation into which admission was impossible, except by the unanimous consent of the members. Under the reorganization the door was in some degree opened to the public by giving the association the character of a joint stock company. But even then there was strenuous opposition to letting the stock get out of the hands of St. Louis parties, and a proposition to admit Mr. Astor to the extent of five shares was rejected.¹³

¹³ The following extract is from a letter from Charles Gratiot to John Jacob Astor, and throws some valuable light upon the workings of the St. Louis traders. It was written December 14, 1811. "I have been engaged for some time past in the settlement and dissolution of the Missouri Fur Company. I acted as agent for one of my relations who was absent. At the request of all the parties I was chosen to draw the articles for a new act of association, which I have made, but which will not be determined upon before next month. The capital of the present company with a moderate valuation is estimated at 30 thou-

The prospects of the new company were far from flattering. The threatening aspect of affairs, already in the shadow of approaching war, had its influence upon business even in the Far West. Communication with the East by way of New Orleans would soon be interrupted. All the Indian tribes within reach of British influence would most likely become disaffected towards Americans. The fur market would be cut off in large part and the price of furs would fall still further. On the whole the company would have been wise to have gone out of business altogether.

Notwithstanding this unfavorable outlook, an expedition was fitted out with eleven thousand dollars' worth of merchandise, and two boats were sent up the river under the personal charge, as usual, of Manuel Lisa. On the 27th of September the returns of the previous year's trade reached St. Louis, but fell short of expectation. The business of the following year was also unsatisfactory, and in the autumn of 1813 the board of directors issued another call for a meeting of the stockholders for the purpose of dissolving the company. Whether the company was actually dissolved, or only reorganized does not appear. It is only known that the business continued under a company of

sand dollars, divided in ten equal shares. I have proposed to extend the ten shares to fifteen, which will give an additional sum of fifteen thousand dollars to the original stock; that an offer should be made to you of the five shares with proposition that you should contract to furnish on commission the equipments necessary for the trade of the upper Missouri, and to make the sales of the furs which would be received in return. This proposition has met with the approbation of some of the members, but I fear will be opposed by others. When I made this proposition I contemplated that you wished to draw the fur trade into your hands. In this view I considered that you would be of great service to each other, or likewise the measure might facilitate the operations of Mr. Hunt, as you could by that means have a communication open from this place to the Columbia."

We shall again have occasion to refer to the far-sighted suggestion with which this extract closes. Had the counsels of Charles Gratiot prevailed, the course of the American fur trade would have been quite different from what it was.

which Lisa was the principal member and from which most of the old members were now absent.

The operations of the fur trade are almost wholly devoid of interest during the next six years. The War of 1812 absorbed the energies and attention of the people, and Lisa seems to have been the only active trader on the Missouri. The company was commonly spoken of as "Manuel Lisa and Company," and all contemporary references to the fur trade are simply accounts of Lisa's operations. The organization underwent further changes in 1814 and again in 1817, but what they were is not known.

It was during the War of 1812 and possibly as a consequence of it that Lisa withdrew his establishments from the upper river and concentrated them at Council Bluffs, where he built his noted trading post of Fort Lisa. Here he spent the greater part of his time for several years and evidently maintained an important establishment. As affairs began to assume a normal aspect after the war he gradually extended his operations up the river as far as to the Mandans. His trade attained considerable magnitude, to judge from notices of the annual arrival of his furs in St. Louis, in which a cargo worth thirty-five thousand dollars is once mentioned and others are referred to as valuable. Business had so far revived by 1818 that Lisa began to consider again the question of attempting to establish a trade at the headwaters of the Missouri and even beyond the Rocky Mountains.

In 1819 the company underwent another reorganization, the last with which Lisa was connected. The members were Manuel Lisa, president, Thomas Hempstead, Joshua Pilcher, Joseph Perkins, Andrew Woods, Moses Carson, John B. Zenoni, Andrew Drips, and Robert Jones,—not a name of those who founded the original company ten years before except that of Lisa, but in their place several new names destined to prominence in the fur trade. This was the year of the celebrated Yellowstone expedition.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Part III., Chapter II.

Lisa's career was now drawing to a close. He was taken ill about August 1, 1820, in St. Louis, and died there on the 12th of that month. In his death the Missouri Fur Company lost its chief spirit, and itself survived only a few years longer.¹⁵

After Lisa's death Joshua Pilcher succeeded to the management of the company. He was a worthy successor to the great trader, possessing his breadth of view, his tireless energy, and being withal a man of upright character and high standing among his fellows. He proceeded at once to develop the project which Lisa had formed, of carrying the trade to the upper rivers, and his first attempts were fairly successful. In the fall of 1821 he established a post named Fort Benton at the mouth of the Bighorn river, the site of the last, as it had been of the first, post built by the Missouri Fur Company. In the spring of 1822 a large expedition under Jones and Immel, consisting of "180 adventurers," left St. Charles for the upper river. The company had now about three hundred men in the mountains, and their operations were meeting with good results. In the fall of 1822 about twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of furs was sent to St. Louis. A Missouri paper referred to this expedition as the "first adventure to the Rocky

¹⁵ Lisa's death occurred on the eve of the real revival of the St. Louis fur trade. The following list of companies doing business on the Missouri in 1819 will show the condition of the trade at that time:

The Missouri Fur Company, capital \$17,000; traded with Pawnees, Omahas, Otoes, Sioux and Iowas; principal establishment at Ft. Lisa, Council Bluffs.

Cerre and Francis Chouteau, capital \$4,000; traded with Osages and Kansas; trading house at mouth of Kansas.

Other traders by the name of Chouteau traded principally with the Osages, having a capital of about \$6,000.

Robidoux and Papin, in company with Chouteau and Berthold, capital \$12,000; traded with the same tribes as did the Missouri Fur Company. Their principal establishment was at Nishnabotna.

Pratte and Vasquez; capital \$7,000; traded with the same tribes; house near the Omaha village.

It will be seen that, while the first of these companies is evidently the most important, none of them were doing a large business.

Mountains" since the revival of the fur trade. At this time the prospect was good that the Missouri Fur Company would reap the rich harvest which fell to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company a few years later. But the same fatality which destroyed the hopes of the first Missouri Fur Company in that region was destined soon to destroy the prospects of the last.

Early in the spring of 1823 Jones and Immel set out from Fort Benton with a large party for the upper Missouri, to carry out Pilcher's plan of opening up a trade with the Blackfeet. Their instructions were to "use every effort to obtain a friendly interview with the Blackfeet, to incur any reasonable expense for the accomplishment of that object, and to impress them with the friendly disposition of American citizens toward them, and with the true object of their visiting the country." The party reached the Three Forks of the Missouri in due time, and remained there until the middle of May, meanwhile trapping the Jefferson Fork nearly to its source. They were somewhat disappointed in their hunt, for they found that the Blackfeet had industriously trapped these streams during the past ten years. They succeeded, however, in securing over thirty packs, which, with their hunt in other sections, made fifty-two packs in all. Finally, May 16, they resolved to return to the Yellowstone, not having come across any Indians; but on the following day, while descending Jefferson Fork, they met a party of thirty-eight Blackfeet. With much precaution they were permitted to approach, when one of them exhibited a letter which was written on the leaf of a notebook, with "Mountain Park, 1823," on the top of the leaf, and the date "1820" on the bottom. It was subscribed "God save the King," and its substance was a recommendation of the bearer as a principal chief of his nation, well disposed toward the whites, and in possession of a quantity of furs. The Indians remained all night with the party, were very friendly, seemed to be greatly pleased at the proposition to establish a post below the Great Falls of the

Missouri, and departed next day with many professions of friendship.

But Immel and Jones did not permit these friendly appearances to throw them off their guard. They knew the treacherous character of the tribe and resolved to make quick work in getting out of the country. They reached the Yellowstone in safety, descended it for a considerable distance, and having practically gotten into the Crow territory, felt themselves comparatively safe. In the meanwhile the band of Blackfeet whom they had left on the Missouri promptly notified others of their tribe, and having increased their number to about four hundred, set out on the track of the whites. They moved down the Yellowstone, got ahead of the whites, and selected a natural position of great advantage for the purposes of ambush.¹⁶

The whites had been very watchful, particularly at night, but made a mistake in not having any flankers out while on the march. At this point there was a steep hill, washed by the river at its base, along which the only track was an intricate buffalo trail, winding among the rocks and trees and so narrow that the party had to pass in single file. On the slope of the hill the Blackfeet had concealed themselves for the purpose of attacking the party as soon as they became completely entangled in the defile. Besides Immel and Jones, we have the names of two others of the unfortunate party, William Gordon and a Mr. Keemle. Gordon had the good fortune to be sent on ahead that day to hunt, and passed the defile in advance of the main party, the Indians permitting him to pass lest they should alarm the rest of the party, if they attacked him. This threw the party still more off their guard, for they were close upon Gordon's trail, who, they might reasonably assume, would give the alarm in case of danger.

¹⁶The site of this battle ground is not definitely known. Lieut. Bradley thought that it was near what is now known as Bridger Creek, but it was evidently far below that. From the fact that the party had traveled two weeks from Jefferson Fork and were within ten miles of the Crow village when they were attacked, and that they reached the

It was on the last day of May, 1823, that the party, twenty-nine in number, arrived at the fatal defile and immediately commenced its passage. "The Indians did not show themselves until the rear of the party had entered the pass, when they rushed furiously upon them from every rock and bush. Knowing Immel and Jones, their chief aim was first to kill them. An Indian, supposed to be one of their principals, rushed boldly upon Immel, covering himself with his shield. Immel, by a well-directed shot, brought him down. His gun was hardly empty when he was literally cut to pieces. About thirty Indians fired and rushed upon him at the same instant and immediately after gave way.

"Jones seized the moment, and although he had received two severe wounds, rallied and assembled his men, and collected the scattered horses, and was pressing forward with some prospect of success to pass the defile and gain the river plain when the Indians rushed upon them with great fury. They attacked the whites with lances, battle axes, scalping knives and every weapon used by Indians. Jones, pierced on every side, fell. . . . Nothing but defeat under such circumstances could be looked for and how so many of them escaped is indeed wonderful."¹⁷

The party lost nearly all their property, including horses, traps and some thirty-five packs of beaver, the total loss being estimated at fifteen thousand dollars. Of the party the two leaders and five men were killed and four wounded. The rest, under the leadership of Mr. Keemle, succeeded, almost by miracle, in constructing a raft and getting across the river. They reached the Crow village near the mouth of Pryor Fork the same day. Mr. Gordon with one man here left the party and proceeded to Fort Vanderburgh, the

Crow village after the attack, the same day, and found it near Pryor Fork of the Yellowstone river, it must be concluded that the scene of the disaster was not far above the mouth of Pryor Fork, probably in the vicinity of the mouth of Canon Creek, near Canon Station on the Northern Pacific railroad.

¹⁷Letter from Joshua Pilcher to Thomas Hempstead, dated September 30, 1823.

Mandan post, where he arrived June 15, and wrote to Mr. Pilcher of the disaster. Mr. Keemle constructed enough bull-boats to transport the party, raised the cache of beaver which had been their fall hunt in the Crow country, and made his way safely to Fort Vanderburgh.

This disaster was a terrible blow to the Missouri Fur Company, and to the hopes of Mr. Pilcher. His conduct of the company's affairs had so far been very successful. He said in a letter to Major Benjamin O'Fallon, dated Fort Recovery, Upper Missouri, July 23, 1823: "This our second adventure to the mountains, had surpassed my most sanguine expectations; success was complete and my views were fulfilled in every respect." We can readily understand the prostration of spirit in which he added: "The flower of my business is gone; my mountaineers have been defeated, and the chiefs of the party both slain."

Rightly or wrongly, the Missouri traders attributed these acts of persistent hostility on the part of the Indians to the instigation of the British traders. It was about the same time that Ashley was attacked by the Aricaras and several of his men killed, while Henry's party near the mouth of the Yellowstone suffered a similar though less disastrous experience. It seemed impossible that these Indians would of their own free will maintain an attitude of such uncompromising hostility. Indignation at repeated outrages may have made the American traders unduly suspicious of the British. Whether these suspicions were well founded or not, it was a fact that the firearms with which the Indians attacked the traders came from across the line, and the furs which they took from our people quickly found their way back there in payment.¹⁸

¹⁸ How deep was the suspicion of British intrigue in all these matters may be seen from the following extract from a letter by Major O'Fallon to General Atkinson, dated July 3, 1823: "I was in hopes that the British Indian Traders had some bounds to their rapacity. I was in hopes, during the late Indian War, in which they were so instrumental in the indiscriminate massacre of our people, that they were completely saturated with our blood. But it appears not to have been

The result of this disaster and similar ones to Ashley and Henry's parties induced Pilcher to withdraw from the trade altogether above the Omahas. He took part in the campaign against the Aricaras with Colonel Leavenworth in the following August and September,¹⁹ and then retired to his main establishment at Council Bluffs.

The company continued to do business for several years under Pilcher's direction and was commonly referred to as Pilcher and Company. It probably operated to some extent in the mountain country, for Pilcher has left the statement that he had several times crossed South Pass. Be that as it may the further operations of the company were of little importance and attracted no attention at the time. The growing power of the Western Department of the American Fur Company and of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was gradually restricting its activities, and it finally passed out of existence altogether. The termination of its career was marked by a rather unusual event in which the moribund company was gracefully bowed off the stage of western history.

In September, 1827, Mr. Pilcher and a party of forty-five men left Council Bluffs for Salt Lake Valley with a complete outfit of merchandise and over one hundred horses. The fame of Ashley's exploits in these regions was now at its height and apparently it was Pilcher's purpose to obtain a share of the wealth of that country. He took the usual

the case. Like the greedy wolf, not satisfied with the flesh, they quarrel over the bones. They ravage our fields and are unwilling that we should glean them. . . . Alarmed at the individual enterprise of our people, they are exciting the Indians against them. They furnish them with . . . the instruments of death and a passport to our bosoms. Immel had great experience of the Indian character, but (poor fellow!) with a British passport they at last deceived him and he fell a victim to his own credulity; and his scalp, and those of his comrades, are now bleeding on their way to the British trading establishments."

The authorities mainly relied upon in the above narrative are *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, vol. II., p. 451 et seq., and *Military Affairs*, vol. II., p. 578 et seq.; Senate Executive Document 39, 21st Congress, 2d Session.

¹⁹ See Chapter III., Part III.

route via the Platte and Sweetwater rivers. In the neighborhood of South Pass Pilcher's horses were all stolen and he was compelled to cache his merchandise. He then went on to Green river, where he spent the following winter. In the spring of 1828 he sent a partner back to the cache for the goods, but they were found to have been nearly ruined by water. The remnant saved was taken to Bear Lake, "then a rendezvous for hunters and traders." After completing the trade, Pilcher's partners and most of the men returned to Council Bluffs, while Pilcher himself, with nine men, "commenced a tour to the northwest with a view of exploring the region of the Columbia river, to ascertain its attractions and capabilities for trade."

It was late in July, 1828, when he set out. His course was northwesterly and he stopped for the winter at Flat-head Lake. In February, 1829, he resumed his journey north, but had not gone far when his horses were stolen. Soon after he fell in with some men belonging to one of the St. Louis traders. His own men becoming disheartened, he discharged all except one, with whom he set out, in company with a British trader, for Fort Colville on the Columbia. He arrived at this post September 1, 1829. Being offered the protection of the Hudson Bay Company express for the east, he accepted and left Fort Colville on the 21st of September, in company with six men. He arrived at Boat Encampment (so called as being the place where the boats are abandoned preparatory to the passage of the mountains) October 4th, and remained there until November 2d, when the express from the east arrived. The party left Boat Encampment November 4th, arrived at the Jasper House on the Athabasca, November 11th, and left there December 17th, equipped with dog sleds and snow shoes. On the first day of January, 1830, they arrived at Fort Assiniboine. Setting out from this point on the 4th they reached Edmonton House, or Fort de Prairie, on the north fork of the Saskatchewan, in a few days more.²⁰

²⁰This post is of particular interest, not only as being one of the

Pilcher left Fort de Prairie January 15th, and passing Fort Pitt, arrived at Carlton House on the 1st of February. Continuing his journey after eleven days' rest he arrived at the Cumberland House the 24th of the same month, and at Moose Lake March 1st. He then set out for Selkirk's settlement in the Red River valley, where he arrived March 26th. Leaving that place on the 29th, and proceeding up the Assiniboine river, he reached Brandon House April 4th. The next day he set out with a half-breed Indian for the Mandan villages on the Missouri, where he arrived on the 22d of April. Here he found Mr. Sanford, Indian sub-agent for the upper Missouri, Daniel Lamont, agent for the American Fur Company, and the German traveler, Prince Paul of Wurtemberg, who was now on his second visit of exploration to the interior of North America. Mr. Pilcher arrived in St. Louis in June, 1830.

His long expedition had given him an acquaintance with the British posts such as at that time was possessed by no other American. He was treated by the Hudson Bay traders with the hospitality so well understood by that company, but which, when dispensed to rival traders, was always accompanied with a firm refusal to assist in any way in their trading operations.

It is about at the time of Pilcher's return to St. Louis that he refers to himself as being no longer in the fur trade, and we may count the Missouri Fur Company as now finally extinct. There seems to be no evidence that it was ever bought out by another company. It had an existence under one style or another for over twenty-five years and was the most important company that did business from St. Louis in the first quarter of the century.

most important of the Hudson Bay Company posts, and the distributing point for the trade of a large section of country at the eastern base of the mountains, but it was the post at which the Blackfeet traded. Even the British found this tribe a troublesome one to deal with, and their post at this point was unusually strong. Pilcher says that it was a "strong stockade, with six bastions, and ten or twelve pieces of small ordnance."

Biographical Notes: Joshua Pilcher was born at Culpeper, Virginia, March 15, 1790; came to St. Louis during War of 1812; was a hatter by occupation, but was engaged in other pursuits as well; is mentioned in 1817 as one of the directors of the Bank of St. Louis. In 1819 he entered the fur trade as a member of the Missouri Fur Company, of which he became president upon the death of Manuel Lisa. He remained at the head of the company until its final dissolution between 1828 and 1830. Entered the service of the American Fur Company in charge of its affairs near Council Bluffs, and remained there about two years. In 1838 he succeeded General Clark as superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis and held the position until his death, June 5, 1847.

Pilcher is represented as a man of good ability, strict integrity of character, and high standing in business and social circles.

Jones and Immel. These two names are almost always seen together, for the reason that about all that is known of them is their connection with the expedition which ended in their tragic death on the Yellowstone in 1823. Benjamin O'Fallon thus refers to them in a letter to General Clark, dated July 7, 1823: "Jones [Robert] was a gentleman of cleverness and for many years a resident of St. Louis. . . . Immel [Michael?] has been a long time on the river; formerly an officer in the U. S. A.; since then an Indian trader of some distinction. In some respects he was an extraordinary man. He was brave, uncommonly large, and of great muscular strength. When timely apprised of danger, he was a host in himself." This may be the same Immel who was associated with Vallé as a free hunter on the upper Missouri in 1810.

CHAPTER VII.

CROOKS AND MCLELLAN.

Robert McLellan—Crooks and McLellan form a partnership—Turned back by the Sioux in 1809—Manuel Lisa charged with bad faith—Crooks and McLellan join Pacific Fur Company—Death of McLellan.

A SMALL trading company occasionally noticed in the annals of the time was that of Ramsay Crooks¹ and Robert McLellan, who prosecuted a trade on the Missouri from 1807 to 1811. Crooks had come to America from Scotland in 1803 and had drifted to St. Louis within the next three years, where he saw and studied the new field of enterprise which the valley of the Missouri offered. Here he met a man suited to his temper and ready to embark in any undertaking that promised ordinary chances of success. This was Robert McLellan, one of the most romantic characters in the annals of the Western fur trade. He was a man of many perilous exploits and hairbreadth escapes, a sure shot, a daring hunter, and altogether a superb example of frontier manhood. He had greatly distinguished himself in the early Indian wars under General Wayne in Ohio, and was already a comparatively old man when he crossed the Mississippi to penetrate the newly acquired wilderness of Louisiana. He entered the trade of the Missouri immediately after the transfer of Louisiana. In the winter of 1805 he was trading with the Omahas and he told Lewis and Clark the following summer that he was opposed in this trade by Joseph Le Croix, a British trader—so far did

¹ A biographical sketch of this able trader is given in Chapter XXIII. of this part.

those daring adventurers of the Northwest Company push their operations into foreign territory. McLellan complained that this competition compelled him to sell his merchandise at an actual loss, but that he determined to hold out in the hope that such interlopers would soon be driven from the field.

It seems to have been in 1807 that McLellan met Crooks and formed a partnership with him. They made up an expedition of eighty men, and, with an outfit advanced on shares (*de moitié*) by Sylvester and Auguste Chouteau, they set out for the upper river in the fall of that year. On their way they met Ensign Pryor returning to St. Louis with the Mandan chief after his defeat by the Aricaras. The report which Pryor brought of the hostile attitude of the Sioux and Aricaras caused Crooks and McLellan to turn back. They established themselves near Council Bluffs and remained there until the spring of 1809.

When they saw the expedition of the Missouri Fur Company ascend the river in the summer of that year they decided to follow. With about forty men they set out up the river, but ill-luck attended their enterprises. While passing the country of the Sioux, a band of these Indians, some six hundred strong, appeared upon a high bank in a concave bend of the river and ordered the boats to turn about and land farther down stream. The number of the Indians was such as to make it out of the question to resist their commands, and Crooks and McLellan, with feigned willingness, turned about. They had an interview with the Sioux, who absolutely forbade them to proceed, but agreed to trade peaceably with them should they remain where they were.

The party was not strong enough to defy the Sioux, and they accordingly had no alternative but to open trade at that point.⁴ Making a virtue of necessity they set about erecting a post with every appearance of good faith. Meanwhile most of the Indians went to their village some twenty miles away to procure articles for trade, leaving only a small guard behind. Crooks and McLellan took advantage of

this absence to carry out in part the purpose of their expedition and also to revenge themselves upon the Indians. They clandestinely sent a party of hunters and trappers up the river in a canoe with directions to collect such furs as they could and to await favorable opportunities to return. As soon as this detachment was thought to be well beyond the hostile country, the partners broke up their trading establishment very suddenly, left a message for the Indians not calculated to mollify their feelings, and themselves made their way to their old establishment down the river.

Crooks and McLellan always claimed that this miscarriage of their plans was due to the machinations of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, whose active agent in accomplishing it was Manuel Lisa. They asserted that Lisa, in order to facilitate his own passage through this hostile country, had told the Sioux that another expedition was on its way with the express purpose of trading with them, and that they must not permit it to pass. This may or may not have been true. Certainly the character of the traders, and the measures often resorted to in their competition are quite in keeping with such a course; but of direct evidence there is none. Even if it were true, the motive was probably not so much to secure a free passage to the Missouri Fur Company, for they had force enough to secure that, as to prevent competition in the upper country. There is moreover some question as to the right of Crooks and McLellan to ascend the river at this time. The contract for the return of the Mandan chief expressly stipulated that Governor Lewis should not, before the departure of the expedition, license any other traders to ascend the Missouri river above the mouth of the Platte. Crooks and McLellan could not have had any such license, therefore, unless they got it after the departure of the expedition, for the licenses to trade were generally renewed every year.

There is likewise no evidence that these gentlemen revealed their plans to Lisa when he passed up, although that wily trader would doubtless have found them out if such

plans were then in contemplation. There was no adequate reason, except personal pique and disappointment of expected gains, to justify this extreme bitterness against Lisa. Certainly there was nothing in Lisa's action which partook so much of the lawlessness of the wilderness as did the plans of McLellan for getting even with him; for he declared repeatedly, with a manner that left little doubt of his sincerity, that if he ever caught Lisa in that part of the country he would shoot him on the spot. How he did so meet him, and how he failed to carry out his threat, will be told in our account of the Astorian expedition.

Disappointed again in their efforts to ascend the river, Crooks and McLellan returned to their post near Council Bluffs. There is some evidence that they made an ineffectual attempt to establish a trade above the Aricaras in 1810, but it is not conclusive. In the winter of 1810-11 both gentlemen entered the Pacific Fur Company and joined the overland Astorian expedition under W. P. Hunt. Their own partnership thus came to an end with the year 1810.

The further careers of these two traders were identified with the Pacific and American Fur Companies. After the return of McLellan to St. Louis in the spring of 1813 he quite disappears from public notice. The only authentic reference to him after this time that has come to light is a notice in a St. Louis paper, dated March 15, 1816, of the administration of his estate. He therefore probably died in St. Louis, although one account of his life says that it was near the Omaha village on the Missouri and another that it was at St. Genevieve.

CHAPTER VIII.

ASTORIA.

ORIGIN AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT.

John Jacob Astor — His early operations — The Louisiana Purchase — The American Fur Company chartered — General plan of operations — Organization of the Pacific Fur Company.

REFERENCE has already been made to the fact that in the earlier years of United States history there was no systematic conduct of its fur trade and no recognized American Fur Company, and allusion was made to those obstacles, notably the possession of the frontier posts by the British, which for many years deterred private enterprise from embarking in that direction. It was not until the final evacuation of these posts that the time was ripe for the commencement of a distinctively American enterprise of this sort.

The opportunity, when it came, was seized upon, not, as might have been expected, by some native-born American, but by a foreigner who had made America his home and was just emerging into prominence in the commercial world. John Jacob Astor, although an alien by birth, is one of America's best examples of self-made men — men of humble beginnings, who, by sheer native ability, have risen to the foremost rank in their respective callings. He easily stands at the head of that ever-expanding roll of financial geniuses which America has produced, for although his operations, measured by their magnitude alone, have been exceeded in later times, the greater difficulties with which he had to contend make them the most extraordinary of any in the commercial history of the United States.

Astor was born July 17, 1763, in the village of Waldorf

near Heidelberg, in the Duchy of Baden, Germany. At the age of sixteen or seventeen he went to London and engaged with an elder brother, who had already established a business there, in the manufacture and sale of musical instruments. After two or three years in London he determined to see if he could not better his fortunes by crossing the Atlantic. He sailed in November, 1783, taking with him a small stock of instruments, the proceeds of which would be his only capital to begin life with in the new world. His ship reached the mouth of the Chesapeake en route for Baltimore in January, 1784, but was detained in the bay by ice until the following March. During the tedious period of waiting he had the good luck to fall in with a fur dealer, who gave him much information and advised him to go to New York with his goods and invest the proceeds of the sale in furs. This Astor did, and having further informed himself as to the conditions and prospects of that line of business, he sailed for London with his furs in the early summer. He disposed of them to advantage, gathered full information regarding the fur markets of Europe, and returned to New York before the end of 1784, having definitely resolved to make America his home and the fur trade his business.¹

Astor's career as a fur merchant began in 1784. His extraordinary judgment of commercial conditions, and his remarkable foresight, told him from the first that the fur business had a great future in store for him. Even his brief investigation of a few months on the occasion of his first visit to America, led him to predict, on his return to London, that "when the [Canadian] frontiers are surrendered I will make my fortune in the fur trade." His grasp of the situation in so short a time is no less remarkable than

¹ Astor's subsequent connection with the fur trade is mostly given in the following pages. In his other business and public relations his career is well known. He became one of America's wealthiest men, one of her most progressive citizens, and before his death was well known throughout the world. He died March 29, 1848.

his confidence in his own powers, which led him, on more than one occasion, to predict his future great wealth. With the full courage of his convictions he embarked in the fur trade immediately upon his return from London and worked himself up by rapid steps until by the end of the century he had become the leading fur merchant of the United States and probably the leading authority in the world upon that business. His reputation had reached beyond the frontier of his adopted country and the magnates of the fur trade in Montreal and St. Louis recognized in him a formidable competitor.² Astor had at this time amassed a fortune of perhaps half a million dollars, had become a ship owner, and had formed commercial relations with the uttermost parts of the earth. It was a great achievement for a man of his years, and for the period in which he lived, and it demonstrated his ability to grapple with the highest problems which the commercial world at that time presented. Such problems were soon to confront him.

Astor's early operations were largely conducted at Montreal, on account of the restrictions of the existing tariff. He frequently visited that city, even going to the trading posts of the interior, and thus familiarizing himself with the details of his business in all its bearings. As the commercial relations between Great Britain and the United States began to assume a more favorable aspect, and the tariff laws of the latter country became less stringent in the article of fine furs, he was able to extend his business further north along the shore of the lakes, and at the same time to conduct it more from New York as a primary base of operations. The course of political affairs was working his way as the power of his own government became more firmly established. The purchase of Louisiana opened up an

²In a letter dated at St. Louis April 29, 1800, addressed to Astor, the writer, Charles Gratiot, said: "You are beyond question the greatest of the fur merchants. Your relations at home and abroad give you facilities which no other house in the United States possesses. You are established in the most active city upon the globe today, where everything is to be found from all parts of the world, etc."

entirely new vista of almost illimitable scope. St. Louis thereby became an American city and all the country of which it was the emporium United States territory. What the extent of the new acquisition was, was not definitely known, except that it was very great. Certainly it included the immense watershed of the Missouri, and it was generally considered that, if the Purchase itself did not extend through to the Pacific, the right of discovery gave America a first claim there. The expedition of Lewis and Clark had shown that this new country abounded in furs, and thus the business field in which Mr. Astor had chosen to exercise his powers was at a single stroke trebled in extent. More than this, if the mouth of the Columbia were now, as he evidently thought, American territory, the commerce of the Orient, that great market for rich furs, was brought practically to his own door.

Mr. Astor was not slow to grasp the magnitude of this new and unexpected development. With China a market for furs from the Pacific coast, with Russian establishments on the northwest coast which his ships might supply as an incident to their main business, with markets at home for the products of the Orient, with lines of trading posts along the Columbia from the sea to its source, connected thence with the Missouri, and extending down that stream to St. Louis, and from that point by way of the Great Lakes to New York itself, Mr. Astor saw that his business would indeed be world-wide in scope and international in importance.

In exploiting his schemes of commercial conquest Mr. Astor was early led to entertain views regarding the expansion of American territory altogether in advance of those of our own statesmen. He believed not only in the desirability but the practicability of our taking possession of the whole Pacific coast from the Spanish to the Russian possessions, and he clearly saw in that distant region the germ of a mighty future empire. He took the only view which a man accustomed to look at things on a broad scale, yet in a plain,

matter-of-fact way, could take, that it would be better for this territory to be in the possession of a single power than to be parceled out among several. There can be no doubt as to what power Mr. Astor thought that this should be.

His projects of commerce led him into relations with his government which, it seems, heartily applauded his views, but could lend him no other aid than tacit encouragement. It is ever to be lamented that President Madison did not see his way to adopt as bold a course in regard to Mr. Astor's enterprise as did his illustrious predecessor in office in regard to the purchase of Louisiana. Had he done so the political map of North America would not be what it is to-day.

The greatness of Mr. Astor's powers is nowhere better shown than in his unhesitating determination to carry out his schemes even without any direct aid from the government. In the year 1808, April 6th, he secured a charter from the state of New York creating the *American Fur Company*. It was the first time that this distinctive national name had been stamped upon the great business of the fur trade — a business peculiarly identified throughout American history with colonial development and expansion. It does not appear that the company was formed with a view to any specific trade, but was rather a general title to include all of Mr. Astor's operations.³

Assured of the approval of the government, Mr. Astor proceeded to elaborate his plans. The general scheme contemplated a central establishment near the mouth of the Columbia, from which the trade was to be prosecuted in all directions in the interior. The supplies for the establishment were to be sent out from New York in an annual ship, which would receive the returns of the trade, dispose of the furs in China, and return home with goods for the home

³ W. W. Astor, in a magazine article upon his illustrious ancestor, says that this corporate body was simply a "fiction intended to broaden and facilitate his operations." The date of the charter has nearly always heretofore been given as 1809.

market. In conjunction with this trade Mr. Astor would also prosecute the coast trade from his vessels, and would endeavor to secure the privilege of supplying the Russian establishments farther north. He saw how great would be his advantage, once thoroughly established on the coast, over his competitors, the Northwest Company, should they extend their trade in that direction. Their line of supply overland across the continent from Montreal would be much longer than that which he might establish from St. Louis with a single river leading more than half the way. The Northwesters could not compete with him in the ocean business, for the British East India Company monopolized that trade. Everything indicated that the plan was feasible and it may be said, after a lapse of ninety years, that nothing has come to light to show that it was not so.

Having fixed upon his general plan, Mr. Astor proceeded to organize his company and fit out his expeditions. As a name to cover this particular enterprise he chose "Pacific Fur Company," but it was in reality only the American Fur Company with a special name applied to a special locality. His long acquaintance and familiarity with the Canadian trade turned his mind in that direction as the best field for recruits trained in the business. He even hoped to signalize the commencement of his undertaking by a master-stroke which should forestall competition in the future. He proposed to the Northwest Company to join him. His offers were alluring, but the managers of that concern did not look with favor upon the alliance, and moreover resolved to anticipate him in his own plans. They declined his offer, but forthwith commenced preparations for a descent upon the Columbia.

A union with the Northwest Company being impossible, Mr. Astor nevertheless organized his company largely from Northwest men. This matter will be referred to later on, in order to trace its influence upon the outcome of the enterprise, but for the present it need only be stated that a large part of the rank and file of the company were subjects of

Great Britain, with which nation the United States was then on the verge of war.

The articles of agreement of the Pacific Fur Company were signed on the 23d of June, 1810. Mr. Astor was to be the head of the company, to furnish the means, not to exceed, however, an advance of four hundred thousand dollars, and to bear all losses for the period of five years. Of the hundred shares into which the stock was to be divided, Mr. Astor was to hold fifty and the associates fifty. The company was to hold its annual general meeting at the central establishment on the Columbia, at which absent members were to be represented by proxy. The term of the association was fixed at twenty years, with the privilege of dissolving it within the first five years if found unprofitable. An agent of the company was to reside at the principal establishment on the Columbia for a period of five years.

The company in the course of its career included the following persons: Mr. Astor, president and principal stockholder; Wilson Price Hunt, of New Jersey, partner and first resident agent; Alexander McKay, Duncan McDougal, Donald McKenzie, Ramsay Crooks, Robert McLellan, Joseph Miller, David Stuart, Robert Stuart, John Clarke, partners. There were in addition some eighteen clerks, and the necessary complement of voyageurs, hunters, and engagés, comprising upwards of one hundred and forty men.

In commencing to carry out his scheme, Mr. Astor organized two expeditions, one to go by sea and the other by land along the route of Lewis and Clark. The first vessel was to stop at the mouth of the Columbia and leave there such material and passengers as were designed for the establishment at that point, and then she was to pursue Mr. Astor's further business along the coast, returning to the Columbia for such furs as might be collected there. The overland expedition would at the same time proceed across the continent and, if things went well, reach the Columbia not much later than the ship.

Mr. Astor's comprehensive mind had arranged a multi-

tude of details, and among them one which shows the high authority of his name at this time throughout the world. He made application to the Russian government for permission to prosecute his purpose of trade with the Russian posts on the northwest coast. His request was granted and he thus entered upon his undertaking with the expressed sanction of two interested governments.

CHAPTER IX.

ASTORIA.

THE EXPEDITION BY SEA.

The *Tonquin*—Voyage of the *Tonquin*—Misunderstandings with Captain Thorn—Crossing the Columbia Bar—Selection of site for fort—*Tonquin* leaves Astoria—The loss of the *Tonquin*—Criticism of Captain Thorn.

THE ship selected by Mr. Astor to convey the sea expedition to its destination was called the *Tonquin*—a vessel of 290 tons burden and a good staunch ship. Her commander was Jonathan Thorn, a United States Naval officer on leave, probably for this purpose through the courtesy of the government. He bore an excellent reputation as an officer, was honest and single-minded in his loyalty to his employer, but unfortunately could not distinguish between the rigid requirements of military discipline and the more pliant authority which should be exercised toward those related to him only by the common bond of commercial adventure. The crew of the vessel numbered twenty-one and the passengers thirty-three. The vessel was well laden with merchandise suited to the trade, and carried in addition a full equipment for hunting and trapping parties, materials and tools for the construction of a small schooner on the Columbia,¹ and for the erection of a trading post, and seeds for the cultivation of the soil around the new establishment. The *Tonquin* weighed anchor September 6th, 1810, and cleared the bar at Sandy Hook September 8th. For a distance she was accompanied by an American naval vessel to protect her against search by British cruisers, an event which

¹For a description of the Columbia river and a consideration of the origin of the name "Oregon," see Part V., Chapter IV.

there was much reason to fear might transpire. The voyage passed off without serious mishap. The Falkland Islands were sighted December 3d, the Pacific ocean was entered December 24th, and the Hawaiian Islands² were reached February 11th, 1811. On the 28th of February the *Tonquin* left the Islands, having taken twenty-four natives on board, and on March 22d, sighted land at the mouth of the Columbia.

The principal feature of the voyage was the irrepressible feeling of hostility that prevailed between the Captain and most of the passengers. More incompatible natures it would have been difficult to bring together. The Captain, as a naval officer, had been educated in the iron discipline of a man-of-war and his temperament emphasized its defects and severities. His relentless rigor could not countenance any laxity, either in business matters or in the relations of officers to those below them. The Canadians were bred to a different sort of life. They were freer with each other, cared little for the punctilio of rank or the requirements of discipline so long as the main purpose of their enterprise was prospering. Those who were partners in the association felt that they were sailing in their own vessel, and they naturally considered themselves entitled to privileges which might not be accorded to the common passenger. Captain Thorn was disposed to give them no higher consideration than the ordinary crew, and he at once commenced applying to them the petty regulations of the ship, such as the putting out of lights at a certain hour, and the like. As the partners stood out stoutly for their rights in these matters, bad blood was engendered, and the Captain more than once threatened to put them in irons.

Captain Thorn, moreover, had conceived a very poor opinion of these associates of Mr. Astor. He knew that they

² It was in these early days that were laid the foundations of that commercial intercourse which nearly ninety years later was to make the Hawaiian Islands a part of the American Republic.

themselves had furnished no money, that they had no property at stake, and he could not see them touch a bale of goods or suggest a measure pertaining to the enterprise, without feeling that they were trifling with his employer's interests. He forgot also that most of them had not been to sea before and that everything was new and strange. Had he not done so he might have experienced less contempt for their desire to land here and there, and for their proclivity for taking notes upon the voyage.

This bitter feeling led to some perilous situations. At the Falkland Islands the Captain became enraged because some of the party who had gone on shore did not return as he had directed. He weighed anchor, and declared in a letter to Mr. Astor that he would certainly have left them had not the wind changed so as to prevent his sailing. The passengers say that his change of mind was prompted by the bold action of young Robert Stuart, who threatened to shoot him if he did not instantly turn about and wait for the party. At the Sandwich Islands the same imperious temper caused him to abandon Edward Aymes, a sailor, after most unmercifully beating him for not returning, on one occasion, promptly to the ship.

He was himself doubtless conscious of his failing in this regard and felt that he was incurring a great deal of ill will on the part of his fellow passengers. He even at one time imagined that they were plotting a mutiny, but of this there is not the slightest evidence.

It was in every way an unfortunate combination. One can readily understand how, from his point of view, the inflexible Captain was sorely disturbed by everything that did not partake of the clockwork regularity and unbending methods of his own manner of life. In this he was an extreme example of a fault by no means unfamiliar to officers of the Army and Navy at all times. He had not the happy faculty of adapting himself to circumstances, and he could not conceive of such a thing as a business-like proceeding in which stern and rigid discipline were not con-

stantly in evidence. It is a strong point in his favor that his crew were generally loyal, and even those who heartily disliked him were compelled to applaud the constant care which he took of the order and cleanliness of the ship and the health of his passengers and crew. With all his failings he kept constantly in view his employer's interests, and while a man with more tact and knowledge of human nature might have maintained equally good discipline and at the same time a friendly relation with his passengers, none could have shown greater singleness of purpose in carrying out what he understood to be his duty.

At the mouth of the Columbia the Captain exhibited what must be pronounced a serious error of judgment, even in his own profession, in his attempts to get over the bar. That wild and tempestuous entrance to the great "River of the West" was well known for its dangers to navigation. At the time of the *Tonquin's* arrival it was in one of its worst moods, when it was almost madness to undertake to sound its channel. Nothing daunted, the Captain at once undertook the task and sent off a boat under charge of the first mate Fox, with a crew of four men. The boat was itself a worthless one, and Fox seems to have felt that he was embarking upon an enterprise from which he should not return. So it proved, for not a word was ever afterward heard from these five men.

On the 23d of March, the Captain continued his efforts, sending out one or two boats which returned without success, but with narrow escapes from disaster. In the afternoon of the next day another crew was sent out, and was soon followed by the *Tonquin* herself. When at the most difficult point of the passage, the strong outward swell (for the Captain had unfortunately selected the period of ebb-tide) swept the small boat out to sea past the *Tonquin*, whose crew were utterly helpless to extend them any assistance owing to the critical situation of the ship. The boat was soon upset and three of the crew were drowned, including one Sandwich Islander. Stephen Weekes, and another

islander, succeeded, by dint of the utmost exertion, in making land, where they were found next day by the main party. Thus, at the very threshold of the great enterprise, eight men lost their lives.

It was during the night that the ship finally found herself at a safe anchorage within the mouth of the Columbia.³ The first care of the crew and passengers of the *Tonquin* was to search for the missing boat crews, and this business occupied most of the 25th of March. They found only Weekes and one Sandwich Islander, and, although some hope of discovering the rest of the party still remained, it was now generally believed that all were lost.

Several days were spent in the search for a suitable site whereon to erect a post. None being found, Captain Thorn became disgusted and proceeded to erect a shed under which to store the material and merchandise for the establishment. He was in haste to get out of the bay and continue the further prosecution of the voyage. The Captain's arbitrary action offended McDougal, the principal partner in the absence of Mr. Hunt, and he, with David Stuart, set out on the 5th of April to explore the south side of the bay. The result of his search was the selection of a site, which, though not entirely satisfactory, was adopted on account of the eagerness of the Captain to discharge his cargo. On the 12th of April sixteen of the party, with the necessary material and equipment, commenced clearing the ground. Soon afterward the *Tonquin* made her appearance and was duly received with a salute of musketry. The new establishment was christened *Astoria*.

The difficulties between Captain Thorn and the partners did not cease with the selection of the site for the post. The Captain could not brook what he considered an unnecessary

³I have assumed March 25th as the date when the *Tonquin* entered the Columbia for it is clear from Irving's detailed description, that the vessel was forced to anchor before she made the entrance, which she finally effected during the night on the flood tide. This must have been between midnight and morning, and the crew were not certain that they were safe over the bar until daylight of the 25th.

delay in getting the new buildings ready to receive the ship's cargo. As soon as possible McDougal established his quarters on shore, so as to be freed from the immediate interference of the Captain, and thereafter their rancorous communications were mostly conducted by letter. The delay in building the post was not by any means entirely inexcusable. The site was occupied by immense trees, and the men were not accustomed to the work of clearing ground of such obstructions. Ross gives an amusing picture of the awkward maneuvers of these inexperienced men in felling the huge trees, and his account makes one wonder, not that the site was long in being cleared, but that it was ever cleared at all. At last suitable buildings for the temporary storage of the *Tonquin's* cargo were completed. The ship was unloaded, and on the 1st of June departed from Astoria with Alexander McKay, partner, on board as supercargo, and James Lewis as clerk. We shall follow to her untimely end the good ship that had brought the Astorians to their destination, and shall return to the *Columbia* at a later opportunity.⁴

The *Tonquin* left Astoria on the 1st of June, 1811, but

⁴Our data for the loss of the *Tonquin*, one of the most appalling marine disasters in history, are derived from a single original source. This was an Indian of the Chehalis tribe, by the name of Lamazee (Irving), Lamazu (Ross) or Lamanse, according to the recent finding of Mr. Bancroft. He had occasionally been employed by coasting vessels as an interpreter and in that way had picked up enough English to make himself useful. He was taken along on the present occasion and was the sole survivor of the massacre. Some months afterward he was brought into Astoria and there related the circumstances of the disaster. His veracity has been impugned by Ross, with what reason I do not know, but in any case necessity compels us to accept his narrative for there is no other. We have five records of what he said derived directly from those who heard him. The first is by Crooks and Stuart, published in the *Missouri Gazette* of St. Louis, May 15, 1813. The second is contained in *Franchère's Narrative*. The third is by Ross Cox. The fourth is by Irving. The fifth is by Alexander Ross. Irving's is the most minute and elaborate of all, and embodies the most reasonable probabilities from the conflicting reports of those who heard the story.

did not succeed in passing the bar until the 5th. She turned north, and at Gray's Harbor picked up an Indian, who had some skill as an interpreter, to assist in the traffic with the natives. In about a week she arrived at Nootka Sound in Vancouver Island, and anchored opposite a large Indian village located on its shores.⁵ The interpreter cautioned Captain Thorn against this tribe, as one noted for treachery toward the whites, but his warnings were unavailing.

The danger to trading vessels from the coast Indians was already well known. Many lives had been lost at their hands. Repeated attempts had been made to capture vessels, and in the case of the ship *Boston*, eight years before, the Indians had succeeded in destroying all but two of the crew. Mr. Astor was thoroughly alive to this peril, and his parting counsel to Captain Thorn was to beware of the Indians, and not to permit many on board at a time, for nearly all disasters on the coast had arisen from this cause.

Captain Thorn had evidently too great a contempt for the population that he found at Nootka to cause him to pay any respect to his interpreter's advice or even to that of his employer. McKay and the interpreter went on shore the day after the arrival. They were well received and remained one or two nights. In the meanwhile Clerk Lewis and the Captain opened up a considerable traffic on board. The Captain was not a very politic trader, and soon got into a wrangle with the Indians, which terminated in his striking the principal chief in the face with a bale of furs, and expelling him from the ship. To the chief it was a mortal insult, and he secretly vowed revenge.

As soon as McKay and the interpreter discovered what had happened they hastened back to the ship and remonstrated with the Captain for his rash conduct. The latter treated their fears with contempt, and, as if confirming his views, the Indians, on their next visit, did appear very friendly and pretended to have overlooked the insult to their

⁵ It is probable that the date of arrival was not later than June 12, although the estimate of time is based upon confessedly meagre data.

chief. Thorn, in return, being doubtless somewhat repentant of his act, treated them civilly and welcomed them aboard. Thus matters went on, for how many days we do not know, but until the Indians felt that all apprehension on the part of the whites was allayed. They then fixed upon a day for the execution of their purpose, and early in the morning commenced carrying it into effect.

While yet Captain Thorn and Mr. McKay were asleep, a pirogue with some twenty Indians aboard, carrying furs indicative of a purpose to trade, arrived alongside the ship. They were admitted on board without hesitation. Soon after, another boat load arrived, and were likewise admitted, and others were seen approaching from shore. The numbers increasing so rapidly, and the empty canoes being left in charge of the women, together with other suspicious circumstances, alarmed the watch. He sent for the Captain and Mr. McKay, who had not yet come on deck. The interpreter cautioned McKay that there was trouble on foot, and McKay communicated his fears to the Captain. But the latter was still unconvinced and affected to believe any serious danger out of the question. The trading opened up briskly, and the Indians showed none of their usual bickering about prices. As far as possible and not excite suspicion, they demanded knives in exchange. These they concealed about their persons, while the merchandise they threw into the canoes in charge of the women. As they became more completely armed they spread themselves about the deck until there were two or three Indians close by every white man.

Thorn at last began to fear that something was wrong, and ordered preparations for sailing. A part of the crew commenced taking up the anchor, and seven men ascended the rigging to unfurl the sails. When the preparations were nearly complete the Captain told the Indians that he was about to depart, and that they would have to leave the ship. Instantly, by a preconcerted signal, they uttered a terrific yell and commenced the attack. Clerk Lewis was

the first man struck, and fell mortally wounded. McKay was the first one killed. He was felled by a war club, flung into the sea and there killed by the women in the canoes. Cox says that he was held for a time in the canoes as a prisoner before he was finally slain. Captain Thorn made a most heroic defense against overwhelming odds, having no weapon but his pocket knife, and was not overpowered until he had slain several of his assailants. It seems that every one on deck was soon killed except Lewis, who had crawled into the cabin.

The men aloft, when they realized the situation, undertook to descend and reach the cabin. Two were killed in the attempt, and Stephen Weekes, who had so miraculously escaped drowning on the Columbia bar, was mortally wounded. He and four uninjured men made their way to the cabin, where, under cover and in possession of fire arms, they soon cleared the ship. The interpreter, during the progress of the fight, had leaped overboard and had taken refuge in the canoes where he was concealed by the women.

The Indians did not return to the boat that day, and at night the survivors of the crew debated what course they should pursue. To try to take the ship away alone was too hazardous, as she would almost certainly be driven ashore where she would fall an easy prey to the natives. It was thought best to abandon her in one of the ship's boats. The wounded man, however, declined to go, urging that he was injured beyond recovery, must soon perish any way, and was determined to sacrifice his life in wreaking vengeance upon the Indians. Who this brave man was is not known. It must, however, have been James Lewis or Stephen Weekes. The narratives of Crooks and Franchère indicate that it was Weekes, while Irving was led to believe that it was Lewis, on account of some expressions which the latter had let fall during the voyage.

Whoever it was, he found a ready instrument for his purposes. In the magazine there were upwards of four and a half tons of powder, enough to blow the ship to pieces.

He resolved to end his own misery by slaying as many as possible of the tribe that had caused it. On the morning following the massacre the Indians cautiously approached the ship. A man appeared on deck and welcomed them on board, but immediately withdrew below. The interpreter, who was with the Indians, thought that it was Mr. Lewis. The Indians soon climbed on board, and meeting no resistance, began to scatter about the vessel, no doubt in high spirits at the rich prospect of plunder before them. Little did they know of the act of stern determination which was then being performed by the intrepid individual who had invited them aboard. He was already at the great magazine prepared to sacrifice his life in revenge upon his savage foes. He ignited the powder, and instantly the vessel was blown to pieces, its wreckage being thrown far and wide with the mutilated bodies of the Indians aboard of and around her. If the massacre had been successful the revenge was doubly so, and for every one of the ship's people who had perished, four or more of the Indians were destroyed. The interpreter himself was on board, but was thrown into the sea unharmed and escaped.

The four men in the ship's boat were now struggling with a contrary wind at the mouth of the bay. They were finally compelled to make for the shore, and having found a sheltered nook, concealed themselves until they could make their escape. It appears that in some way the Indians suspected the escape of some of the crew, doubtless because they had found on board next morning but one of the men who had driven them from the ship the day before. Knowing that they could not survive the sea in its condition that day in an open boat, they rightly concluded that they must be along the shore somewhere within the mouth of the bay. A search was commenced and resulted in the capture of the four men, who were brought to the village and there put to death by torture. Before this took place the interpreter obtained from them a relation of the events which had transpired after the massacre.

For this awful disaster Captain Thorn must alone be held responsible. He violated the instructions of Mr. Astor in admitting the Indians on board, and he displayed a culpable want of tact in dealing with them. His contemptuous treatment of the warnings of Mr. McKay and the interpreter was inexcusable. But he paid for his errors with his life, and while these errors must be charged to his account, they did not involve a suspicion of disloyalty or lack of integrity. Irving, who knew him in childhood, and felt the natural indulgence which such acquaintance inspires, has dealt with his memory with a degree of consideration which does it the most ample justice.

With singular rapidity and accuracy the news of this great catastrophe spread among the Indian tribes, and the overland Astorians were apprised of it while yet far from their destination. The news likewise made its way quickly to New York, for there is a letter by Charles Gratiot dated St. Louis, May 31, 1812, stating that he had received a letter from Astor giving information of the loss of the *Tonquin*. Astor must therefore have heard of his loss not later than the winter of 1811-12.

To the Astorians, among the uncertainties of a new and trying situation, and menaced by an uprising of the surrounding tribes, the loss of the *Tonquin* was a terrible calamity. To Mr. Astor it was an evil augury for the success of the enterprise upon which he had built such far-reaching hopes.

CHAPTER X.

ASTORIA.

THE OVERLAND EXPEDITION — WEST.

Mr. Hunt at Montreal—Arrives in St. Louis—Winter camp at Nadowa—Hunt spends winter in St. Louis—Trouble with Manuel Lisa—Hunt leaves St. Louis—Entire party leaves Nadowa—Lisa attempts to overtake Hunt—Lisa overtakes Hunt—Quarrel between Lisa and Hunt—Arrival at the Aricara villages—Hunt decides to abandon river—Departure from Aricara villages—Expedition stops at the Cheyennes—Edward Rose—Arrival at Green river—Party on Snake river in Jackson Hole—Arrival at Fort Henry—Decision to abandon horses and take to canoes—Departure from Fort Henry—Disaster at Caldron Linn—Departures from Caldron Linn—Hunt and Crooks stopped by the mountains—Hunt leaves Snake river for the Columbia—Arrival at Astoria—McKenzie, McLellan and Reed—Experiences of Crooks and Day—The route of the Astorians.

IN June, 1810, Mr. W. P. Hunt, one of the partners in the newly-formed Pacific Fur Company, went to Montreal, where, in company with another partner, Donald McKenzie, he set about organizing the overland party. The work in Montreal was completed without serious difficulty, and on the 5th day of July, Hunt and McKenzie set out for Mackinaw, where it was proposed to take additional recruits. The route pursued was by the Ottawa river, and the party arrived at Mackinaw on the 22nd of July. At this point Mr. Ramsay Crooks, future president of the American Fur Company, was received into the concern. Mr. Hunt experienced a great deal of opposition at Mackinaw in securing the men he wanted, but by dint of shrewd management he at length succeeded. On the 12th of August the augmented party set out via Lake Michigan, the

Fox and Wisconsin rivers and the Mississippi to St. Louis, where they arrived on the 3d of September.

At St. Louis Mr. Hunt received another partner, Joseph Miller, and made a considerable addition to the party. In order to avoid the expense of wintering in St. Louis, he decided to select a place well up the Missouri beyond the frontier. Accordingly he set out from St. Louis on the 21st of October and stopped November 16th a little above the site of St. Joseph, Missouri, near a small stream called the Nadowa. He stopped none too soon, for the river closed with ice the second day after his arrival.

Three days after Mr. Hunt's departure from St. Louis, letters arrived for him from Mr. Astor, addressed in the care of Mr. Gratiot, who forwarded them by the first opportunity. These letters, it seems, contained important orders from Mr. Astor, giving to Mr. Hunt the chief direction of the overland expedition, which had so far been managed by Hunt and McKenzie on equal footing. This course gave great offense to McKenzie, who considered it a violation of his arrangement with Mr. Astor. It was treasured up as a wrong not to be overlooked, and had a decisive influence on his conduct during the trying period which soon arrived on the Columbia.

At Nadowa Mr. Hunt was joined by Robert McLellan, a partner of Crooks in his recent trading expeditions up the Missouri river. He was given a partnership in the enterprise. John Day, an experienced hunter, also joined the party at this point. In order to attend to personal affairs and to secure more hunters, and also an interpreter for passing the Sioux Indians, Mr. Hunt left Nadowa January 1, 1811, and arrived at St. Louis on the 20th of that month.

In his negotiations at St. Louis during the winter, Hunt was opposed by the Missouri Fur Company and by Manuel Lisa, its principal agent. There seems to have been no adequate reason for this opposition inasmuch as the new expedition was not to operate in the Missouri Fur Company territory, but there may have been a feeling that it was a

step on the part of Astor to gain a foothold on the Missouri. Finally, as Mr. Hunt was about to leave St. Louis, this opposition took acute form in the case of Pierre Dorion, who figured for many years as half-breed interpreter among the Indian tribes of the Missouri. Dorion had been in Lisa's service only the year before, and while up the country had contracted a debt for liquor for which Lisa had charged him at the rate of ten dollars a quart. This extortionate charge Dorion refused to pay, and any reference to it by Lisa aroused his passionate indignation. Lisa tried to secure his services again in opposition to Hunt, but the remembrance of the liquor debt defeated his purpose. Dorion took service with Hunt, almost upon his own terms, for besides an extravagant salary he stipulated that his wife and two children should accompany him. Lisa, having failed to detain Dorion, resorted to severer measures, and undertook to have him arrested for debt. In this he was defeated through the timely offices of John Bradbury, the English naturalist, who, with Mr. Nuttall, also an Englishman, were to accompany Mr. Hunt for a considerable distance up the Missouri. Hunt with his party of recruits left St. Louis March 12, 1811. Bradbury and Nuttall remained one day longer to await the arrival of the post, intending to overhaul the boat at St. Charles. Hearing of Lisa's intentions during the day, they set out at 2 A. M. on the 13th, and met the boat the next morning before its arrival at St. Charles, where Lisa was to arrest the interpreter. Dorion at once took to the woods and rejoined the party the following day.

Hunt now proceeded with ordinary progress up the river. On the 17th of March he passed the hamlet of La Charette, a little beyond which, on the following day, Bradbury had a long visit with John Colter. On the 8th of April he arrived at Fort Osage, about forty miles below the present site of Kansas City. Here he was met by Crooks and a few men. The united party proceeded on their way on the 10th, and arrived at the Nadowa wintering ground on the 17th. The

winter quarters at Nadowa were abandoned April 21st, and the entire party commenced its long journey to the Pacific.

In the meanwhile Manuel Lisa had set out from St. Louis for the upper Missouri to learn what had become of Andrew Henry, and also to bring down the winter's trade. He was fully aware of the dangers to be encountered in passing the Sioux nations on the Missouri, and was very desirous of overtaking Hunt in order that both expeditions might pass this perilous section together. He had one of the best keelboats that ever ascended the Missouri, and had manned it with twenty picked men. Lisa was a host in himself, being a man of intense energy and never afraid to take hold of any part of the work with his men, leading them in their songs, and otherwise stimulating them to extraordinary exertions. With these advantages he hoped to overtake Hunt, notwithstanding the considerable start of the latter; for on the 2nd of April, when Lisa left St. Charles, Hunt was nineteen days and about two hundred and forty miles ahead.

This remarkable keelboat race, covering a period of just two months and a distance of about eleven hundred miles, is one of the notable events in early Western history. For the greater part of the trip the elements were strong against Lisa. He encountered almost continuous storms and wind, and the difficulties of the trip were considerably above the average. Owing to this fact he did not quite accomplish his purpose of overtaking Hunt before the latter reached the Sioux country.

When Hunt arrived in the neighborhood of the present city of Omaha, where Crooks and McLellan had their principal establishment, Crooks went over to the Platte river to close up his business with the Oto Indians, promising to rejoin the expedition at the Omaha villages. He took his departure May 2nd, accompanied by Bradbury. As Hunt was about to leave the wintering ground of Crooks and McLellan he lost two men, Samuel and William Harrington, by desertion. He reached the Omaha villages on the 10th of May, and was rejoined there by Crooks and

Bradbury on the following day. Lisa was now about one hundred and fifty miles behind Hunt.

On the 19th of May Lisa passed the Omaha villages, and now, despairing of overtaking Hunt before the latter should arrive at the Sioux country, he dispatched a message overland requesting him to wait. This message overtook Hunt near the mouth of the Niobrara river. Hunt sent back an answer that he would wait, but immediately set out with redoubled exertions to get away from Lisa. This unconscionable action was not justified even by the exigencies of fur trade competition. It was caused by the representations of Crooks and McLellan, who believed, rightly or wrongly, that Lisa had been the cause of their detention by the Indians in 1809, and that it was his plan in this instance to get ahead of Hunt and play the same trick on him. Admitting that Lisa was entirely capable of such a proceeding, the circumstances surrounding this case were such that they must have shown Mr. Hunt, had he stopped to reflect, that it could not have been the present motive. Lisa had but a small force, twenty men, wholly insufficient to pass the Sioux country with safety; he knew that Hunt was not planning to enter the trade of the Missouri, but was going to the Columbia, and thus there was an absence of motive for such a proceeding as Hunt suspected. The subsequent course of events showed this to be the case, and it is only simple justice to Lisa to exculpate him from any insincerity in this affair. But McLellan was so imbued with the idea that Lisa could mean nothing but treachery, that he not only threatened to shoot him as soon as he should meet him in the Indian country, but prevailed upon Hunt to take the underhand course which he did. In this way the chances of disaster to both parties were greatly increased, and no good end was served.

On May 22nd Hunt picked up Alexander Carson and Ben Jones, and on the 26th John Hoback, Edward Robinson, and Jacob Rezner, all of whom had gone up the river with the Missouri Fur Company. The latter three were return-

ing from Henry's abandoned post on the north fork of Snake river. It is probable that these five men belonged to the forty "Americans and expert riflemen" who escorted the Mandan chief to his nation. These acquisitions to Hunt's force were partly neutralized by the desertion of two men on the 25th of May.

Late in the month of May the wind and weather which had hitherto been against Lisa turned more in his favor. When he reached the Niobrara he was but sixty miles behind Hunt. Finding that Hunt had not waited for him, and feeling the imminent peril of his situation, he redoubled his exertions, frequently sailing nearly all night, and on one occasion making seventy-five miles in twenty-four hours. Unextinguished fires at Hunt's old camps told him that his efforts were counting, and that he could not be far behind.

On May 30th Hunt was stopped by the Indians, but by a bold and fearless display of force he prevented any hostile action. Lisa met the same Indians June 1st, and also succeeded in getting away from them without serious trouble. On the 1st of June Hunt had another conference with the Indians and again escaped without difficulty. On the morning of the 2nd, while still parleying with the Indians, Lisa's boat hove in sight. Hunt went on for about five miles and then waited for his rival to come up. Lisa had won the race, although not so soon as he had expected. His performance had been a prodigious one when the difficulties of keelboat navigation on the Missouri river and the particularly unfavorable weather of the trip are taken into consideration. He had averaged over eighteen miles per day for sixty days.

The united parties now proceeded at a leisurely rate and in apparent good humor until the 5th. The weather this day being such that the boats could not proceed, the parties remained in camp a short distance from each other. During the day Lisa and Dorion got into a quarrel over their old difference, and Hunt himself soon became involved on Dorion's side. The matter was rapidly approaching a climax in

the form of a duel between Hunt and Lisa, when it was finally settled through the good offices of Bradbury and Brackenridge. McLellan was present, but his threat to shoot Lisa did not materialize. The two parties arrived at the Aricara villages June 12, 1811, thus terminating the first stage of the overland expedition.

Hunt's original plan had been to ascend the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. But the information derived from the recruits whom he had picked up below, of the great danger of attempting to pass the country of the Blackfeet, decided him to leave the Missouri at the Aricaras, and to make the rest of the journey to the Columbia by land. It was therefore necessary to secure horses enough to transport his goods, and these he resolved to try to get of the Aricaras. Accordingly a conference was held with these Indians immediately upon the arrival of the party, at which Lisa's extremely pacific and generous conduct largely allayed the suspicions of the other party. Negotiations for horses were at once commenced by Hunt and continued for more than a month. He also entered into an arrangement with Lisa by which he exchanged boats and surplus supplies for horses. To secure these it was necessary to visit Lisa's post among the Mandans, one hundred and fifty miles farther up. Lisa, Brackenridge, and Nuttall set out by boat June 19th, and Crooks and Bradbury by land the same day. The latter party reached the fort late at night on the 22nd, and the boat party arrived on the 26th. Crooks started on his return with the horses next day and arrived safely at Hunt's encampment. Lisa and the other gentlemen left by river on the 6th of July and reached the Aricaras on the next day.

On the 17th of July Brackenridge and Bradbury left for St. Louis, and without serious incident other than considerable peril from a storm arrived at their destination on the 1st of August. The presence of these two gentlemen on the expeditions of Hunt and Lisa was a most fortunate event, for it is mainly upon their published journals that our knowledge of the expeditions rests.

The next day after the departure of Brackenridge and Bradbury, Hunt with his whole party took up their long and uncertain journey to the westward. It was a serious moment to most of them, for no one knew what lay ahead, and they found but little consolation in the doubtful looks of Lisa's people who had been upon the upper rivers. But the party nevertheless set off, sixty-four in number, including Dorion's squaw and two children, and the interpreter, Edward Rose. There were eighty-two horses, of which each of the partners and the interpreter, Dorion, had one. The rest, seventy-six in number, were laden with the merchandise and other material which it was necessary to take along. From this statement some idea may be had of the considerable amount of freight which the expedition undertook to carry.

On the 23rd of July Hunt went into camp on the banks of what was then called Big river, near a camp of friendly Cheyennes. Here he remained until the 6th of August, laying in buffalo meat and procuring more horses.¹ An accession of thirty-six horses enabled him to allot one horse to every two of the rest of the party. On this part of the journey Mr. Crooks was for some time seriously indisposed, and had to be carried on a litter.

At about this time Mr. Hunt became thoroughly, and it would seem unnecessarily, alarmed on account of his new interpreter, Edward Rose, whom he had hired to help him while in the country of the Crows. Rose had been among these Indians for two or three years, having probably gone up the river with the Missouri Fur Company in 1809, though possibly with Lisa in 1807. Certain suspicious actions of Rose had induced the belief that he was plotting to betray the party to the Crows. How far these suspicions were well founded can not be said, but the probabilities are all against them. At any rate, Hunt was badly worked up over the matter and resorted to precautions which seem

¹The Aricaras and Cheyennes were horse-dealing tribes.—See Part V., Chapter IX.

almost ridiculous, considering the strength of his party.²

Setting out anew on the 6th of August, the party made their way through the maze of hills and streams on the northern border of the Black Hills and across the desolate wastes beyond. On the 17th of August Hunt first saw, from the top of a considerable hill near the route, the distant range of the Bighorn mountains. On the 30th of August the party arrived at the foot of this range and spent two days in the pleasant valleys of the foothills in company with a band of Crow Indians whom they met there. On the 2d of September they left Rose among his old associates and resumed their journey. After considerable difficulty in finding a pass, during which they were obliged to accept the guidance of the Crows for a distance, they made their way through the mountains and met a band of Shoshones on the western slope. On the 9th of September the party reached Wind river just above the cañon where its lower course takes the name of Bighorn river. They continued up this stream for eighty miles and left it at 3 P. M. September 15th, to cross the Wind River mountains into the valley of Green river. The whole of the next day was spent in making the passage, which seems to have been in the neighborhood of Union Pass, and it was not until the evening of the 16th that they reached Green river well towards its source. While on the summit of the pass they caught a glimpse of the Teton mountains, already familiar landmarks to Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner.

The party continued in the valley of Green river until the 24th of September and spent the time hunting buffalo, curing meat and recuperating their horses. They resumed their journey on the above date, crossed the divide between Green and Snake rivers, and followed down Hoback river to its junction with the Snake where they arrived on the 26th of September. Here there was a clamor among the members of the party to abandon the horses and take to the river. But information derived from the Indians, and

²For a sketch of this interesting character see Part IV., Chapter VI.

from a reconnaissance along the river, showed that navigation was impracticable. At this point Hunt detached a trapping party of four men to remain in the neighborhood during the winter. They were Alexander Carson, Pierre Delauney, Pierre Detayé, and one St. Michael. He then proceeded on his way October 4th, making for Henry's fort upon the advice of Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner, and after crossing Snake river and Teton pass arrived at the abandoned post *October 8, 1811.*

At Fort Henry Hunt committed the great mistake of the expedition. He yielded to the desires of the party, abandoned the horses, and decided to trust to the river the rest of the way. He at once set about manufacturing canoes, and this work was completed and the flotilla loaded within ten days. In the meanwhile, October 10th, a second party of trappers was detached, consisting of Joseph Miller, one of the partners, John Hoback, Edward Robinson, Jacob Rezner, and a man named Cass. Miller joined the party because, apparently, he was disgusted with the enterprise and had decided to throw up his share. The other partners were astonished and mortified at this strange resolution, but could not prevail upon him to alter it.

On the 19th of October the party left their horses in the care of two Snake Indians and embarked in fifteen canoes on the strong, dark, rapid stream. It was a delightful change, and the swift progress of the first day was for the time being a complete confirmation of the wisdom of having adopted it. But the satisfaction was of short duration. The river soon began to show its true character as a treacherous and torrential mountain stream, and gloomy forebodings quickly followed hopeful anticipations. After having passed without serious loss several dangerous places, they at length came, October 28th, to a terrific strait where one of the canoes, containing Mr. Crooks, was wrecked on a rock and one of the men, Antoine Clappine, was drowned. The appearance of this frightful place completely dismayed the party, who gave it the expressive names of "Caldron Linn" and the "Devil's Scuttle Hole."

It was now apparent that further navigation of the river was not to be thought of until it should be explored and its character determined. Parties were at once dispatched down both banks, Mr. Hunt himself going down the right bank some forty miles. He returned with ill report, but the other party thought that boats could be managed after reaching a point six miles below. Four of the canoes were accordingly sent on to make the trial and at the same time John Reed, the clerk, and three men were sent for a more extended exploration of the river. The canoe party returned the day after setting out, having lost their canoes.

The situation that now confronted the party was indeed a grave one, and they fully realized the folly of abandoning their horses and trusting to an unknown stream in the heart of the mountains. The various wreckages and losses had reduced their provisions so that they were face to face with starvation. They had with them a large quantity of goods, and were absolutely without means of transporting them. But something had to be done at once. "After a little anxious but bewildered counsel," as Irving well puts it, three parties set out in addition to that of Mr. Reed which had left two days before. McLellan, with three men, started down stream, McKenzie with four men started north over the desert, and Crooks with five men started back after the horses at Fort Henry. Hunt with the rest of the party began caching their goods so as to be ready for instant departure should necessity demand. Crooks returned after three days, having given up the idea of returning to Fort Henry. Five days later two of Reed's men returned and pronounced the river unnavigable. It was then definitely resolved to abandon any further attempt at navigation and to proceed on foot. Such goods as were not absolutely indispensable were concealed in nine caches, and the party was divided into two detachments, one to descend each bank of the river. Mr. Hunt, with twenty-two persons, including Dorion's family, took the right bank, and Crooks with eighteen men took the left. The divided party set

out from Caldron Linn on the 9th of November, still in the mountains with winter at hand.

Hunt's party made their way with much suffering, though with occasional relief at the scattering encampments of Indians, to the neighborhood where the great river, having taken a course almost due north, breaks through the Blue mountain range. A few horses had been secured on the way which relieved the men to some extent of their packs. Dorion's family in particular found this relief a most grateful one. On the 6th of December Hunt was brought practically to a standstill by the mountainous country in front of him, and on the following morning was hailed from the other bank by Crooks' party, whom he had not seen for nearly a month. Crooks had proceeded more rapidly than Hunt and had gone three days' journey farther down stream until his progress had been barred by the mountains. The condition of his party as regards provisions was even more desperate than that of Mr. Hunt, who at once sent across the river an allowance of such as he had.

A retrograde march was now resolved upon for the purpose of securing provisions from the Indians farther up the river. Crooks, who, with one man, had come across the river, was taken sick and was unable to return to his party. Hunt's party proceeded up stream, but Crooks, being sick, fell somewhat behind. He caught up on the 11th of December, when, at his urgent request, more provisions were sent across to his party on the other bank. On one of the return trips, Jean Baptiste Prevost, having become frantic at the sight of some meat, forced himself into the frail craft, upset it before it got across, and was drowned. At this place John Day crossed to the right bank.

Hunt now left Day and Crooks with a few men and hastened on to the stream, Weiser river, which he had passed on the 26th of the previous month. Among the Indians who were encamped some distance up this stream he remained until December 21st, when, having procured a stock of provisions and a guide, he set out on his way to the Co-

lumbia. Descending the Weiser to the Snake river he crossed his party with great difficulty. He left behind him Crooks, Day, and four Canadians who resolved to remain among the Snakes rather than undertake the perils of a winter journey across the Blue mountains.

On the 24th of December Hunt left the Snake river under the guidance of the Indian, and six days later, December 30th, arrived at the broad mountain valley later known as the Grande Ronde. The only incidents of importance on this six days' journey were that two of the men, La Bonté and Carrière, gave out and had to be put on horses, and that Dorion's wife gave birth to a child on the morning of the 30th.

Having celebrated New Year's day, 1812, in the Grande Ronde with such cheer as could be obtained from a small band of Indians found there, Hunt and his party set out to cross the Blue mountains, the last barrier that separated them from the Columbia. A week was consumed in crossing the range during which time Dorion's new-born child died and Carrière was lost, never to be heard of after. On the 8th of January Hunt reached the Umatilla river in a warm and pleasant valley and found there some prosperous and well-provided Indians with whom he rested for upwards of two weeks.

On the 20th of January Hunt resumed his journey and moved to the north toward the Columbia where he arrived on the following day. He crossed to the north shore and descended the right bank of the river until he came to the "Long Narrows" (The Dalles) about the end of the month. From the Indians along the river, as well as from those on the Umatilla, Hunt gathered a great deal of information about the establishment at the mouth of the Columbia, the arrival of McLellan, McKenzie, and Reed, and the loss of the *Tonquin*. Finally, having passed the Cascades of the Columbia, Hunt embarked in canoes on the 5th of February and arrived with his party at Astoria, *February 15, 1812*.

McKenzie, McLellan, and Reed, whom we saw depart

from the Caldron Linn, luckily united their parties at some distance below that point, near the base of the mountains which later stopped Hunt and Crooks. They were twenty-one days getting through these mountains, when they struck the Clearwater river and thence made their way to the Snake, or as it was there called, the Lewis river. Down this stream and the Columbia they made their way with no more serious accident than the upsetting of McLellan's canoe, January 1, 1812, and the loss of his rifle. The party reached Astoria, *January 18, 1812*, nearly a month in advance of Hunt.

Great was the rejoicing at Astoria upon the arrival of these parties with so few losses; for while the fate of Crooks and his men was still doubtful, there were only three men known to have been lost in the almost insuperable difficulties in which the expedition had become involved. Their safe deliverance was a cause of deep gratitude, and a day was at once given over to a general jubilee.

Returning now to look after Crooks and Day we find that they had not long delayed after the departure of Hunt from the banks of the Snake river. Three of the Canadians abandoned them in February, preferring to remain with the Indians rather than continue the journey. They entirely lost Hunt's trail on his arrival at the Grande Ronde and remained in that vicinity during the rest of the winter, subsisting on beaver and horses. Late in March they resumed their journey, but the Canadian, Dubreuil, who had come with them thus far, gave out, and was left behind with a band of Shoshone Indians. Crooks and Day now went on alone and near the middle of April arrived safely on the banks of the Columbia at about the same point where Hunt had crossed it. Here they found a hospitable tribe of Indians who helped them in their necessities. They soon started down the river, but when near the head of the rapids they were attacked by the native banditti who infested that region, stripped utterly naked and robbed of everything they had with them. They then started back to find the

friendly Indians whom they had lately left. On the 1st of May they were picked up by David Stuart's party returning from Okanagan, and with them proceeded to Astoria, which they reached on the *11th of May, 1812*.

There were still absent the four men who had been left by Crooks, and the two detached trapping parties on Snake river — in all thirteen men. Of these, seven reached Astoria nearly a year later, *January 15, 1813*.

Hunt had left St. Louis March 12, 1811, and arrived at Astoria February 15, 1812, a period, including these two dates, of three hundred and forty days. His own estimate of the distance was thirty-five hundred miles. The most direct railroad route at the present time makes the distance from St. Louis to Astoria twenty-three hundred miles. Of the three hundred and forty days consumed at least one hundred and forty were spent in camp at various points or in retrograde marching on Snake river.

Below will be given as close a description of the route followed after leaving the Missouri as it is possible to prepare from the meagre information obtainable. It is believed to be correct within a small error, even in the most doubtful places, while for the greater part of the way it is known to a certainty. The route is laid down on the accompanying map.

The Aricara villages, where Hunt organized for his overland journey, were eight or ten miles above the mouth of Grand river, and thirteen hundred and twenty-five miles above the mouth of the Missouri. From this point the route bore first to the northwest a short distance, then southwest across Grand river and probably one or more branches of the Moreau. Inclining then a little to the north nearer to the valley of Grand river the route followed pretty closely the divide between this stream and the Moreau or possibly went back to the south fork of the Grand. It crossed the state line between South Dakota and Montana near the parallel of 45 degrees 20 minutes, and soon after struck the Little Missouri. It kept up the right bank of

this stream some ten miles when it crossed not far from the modern postoffice of Alzada, and bore off to the westward. Coming into a difficult country it bore south for some distance passing near the Missouri Buttes from which vicinity Hunt and McKenzie had their first glimpse of the Bighorn mountains.

From this point the route followed the general line of the divide between Powder river and the Belle Fourche (North Fork of Cheyenne) inclining toward the former stream, which it reached near the mouth of Pumpkin creek, some twenty miles northeast of Pumpkin Buttes, well-known landmarks of later years.

Crossing the river it reached the base of the mountains along one of the southernmost branches of Crazy Woman's Fork of Powder river. The distance traveled so far is given as four hundred miles by Irving, and four hundred and fifty miles by Crooks, the second estimate being more nearly correct.

In seeking a pass across the mountains during the next few days the party moved southward some thirty miles and entered the range along one of the branches of the middle fork of Powder river, emerging on the other side into the valley of No-Wood creek, near where the little village of Red Bank now stands. The route then took a southwesterly course across a divide into the valley of Bad-Water creek, which it followed to its confluence with Wind river.³

No portion of the above route east of the Bighorn chain is now followed as a highway of travel, and its exact location is a matter of uncertainty; but the route given is believed to be correct within an error of five miles on either side. The route across the Bighorn mountains has become a regular highway.

The course of the party after reaching Wind river was up

³ The portion of the route across the Bighorn range has been followed in detail by Ex-Gov. W. A. Richards, of Wyoming, a close student of the history of his state, and the owner of a ranch in that locality.

⁴ and indebted to him for valuable suggestions in this and other connections.

the valley of that stream, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, to the near vicinity of where the modern road turns off to Union Pass. There is no doubt that the party followed the regular Indian trail across the Wind river range, and crossed by the pass to which Captain Reynolds, forty-nine years later, gave the name "Union."

From Union Pass the route lay directly across the headwaters of Green river; thence up one of the small unnamed tributaries of that stream and over a divide to Hoback river which it followed to Snake river.

Crossing Snake river the route followed the regular Indian trail across Teton pass into the valley of Pierre's Hole and down that valley to Henry's Fort on the north fork of Snake river.

Of that portion of the route which the party followed after reaching Wind river nearly all has since been used as a public highway. The distance from the Aricara villages to Fort Henry was estimated by Crooks at nine hundred miles and may be considered as the first division of the overland journey. It was all made by packtrain and on horseback, in an entirely successful manner, although with what now seems to have been a good deal of unnecessary delay.

The second division of the journey was from Fort Henry to Caldron Linn⁴ where the shipwreck took place. It was made by water all the way and its location is therefore known with precision. The position of the Caldron Linn is not positively known, for the river distances given by the party are absurdly exaggerated. It was probably half way between the American and Shoshone Falls. Irving gives the distance as three hundred and forty miles from Fort Henry; Crooks as four hundred miles. With the utmost allowance for river windings it could not have been more than two hundred miles. This enormous exaggeration

⁴This name was probably given by Crooks or McKenzie, the Scotchmen of the party, for Linn is from a Scotch word *Lin* or *Lyn* and means a pool of water in a perturbed state, as at the foot of a waterfall. The caches at Caldron Linn were on the right bank of the Snake river.

arose from an over-estimate of the velocity of flowing water and also from the natural tendency among travelers to over-estimate distances when the difficulties are either slight or great.

The third division of the journey was made on foot from Caldron Linn to Astoria. For a part of the way it was made in five parties, of which three were small detachments under Reed, McLellan, and McKenzie, and two were larger ones under Hunt and Crooks. All followed the general direction of Snake river but the route of Hunt, who had the main party, will alone be considered.

Hunt's route lay along the right bank of the Snake to the neighborhood of the modern Henry's Ferry, and then left the river in a direction slightly west of north until it reached the Boise river near where Boise City now stands. The route then lay down the Boise to the Snake and then down the right bank of the latter stream, to about opposite the mouth of Powder river, Oregon, a tributary of the Snake. Hunt estimated the distance from Caldron Linn at four hundred and seventy-two miles.

Hunt now went back as far as Weiser river where he obtained some supplies and horses from the Indians. He then crossed the Snake near the mouth of the Weiser. The route from here on was practically that of the later Oregon trail. It followed the regular Indian trail through the Grande Ronde, across the Blue mountains and down to the valley of the Umatilla. Thence it descended this valley for some distance and then crossed over to the Columbia near the mouth of the Walla Walla. The remainder of the route was along the Columbia river.

CHAPTER XI.

ASTORIA.

BEGINNINGS ON THE COLUMBIA AND THE OVERLAND EXPEDITION — EAST.

Prosperous beginnings — Rumors of Northwest Company traders — David Thompson arrives at Astoria — Defensive measures against the Indians — The *Dolly* christened — Arrival of the Overland Astorians — Departure of an expedition for the interior — Battle at the Falls of the Columbia — Return of party to Astoria — Arrival of the *Beaver* — War declared by United States against Great Britain — Second expedition leaves Astoria for the interior — Visit of Reed to Caldron Linn — Adventures of Astorian hunters — Stuart and Crooks start for St. Louis — They meet Miller, Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner on Snake river — Arrival at Caldron Linn — On Bear river — Turning north to find Hunt's trail — Robbed by the Crows — On Hunt's trail — McLellan's pilgrimage — Crooks' illness — Arrival in Green river valley — Danger of starvation — Arrival in the Sweetwater valley — The "Fiery Narrows" — Decide to go into winter quarters — Abandonment of first winter quarters — Second winter quarters — Party abandon quarters in spring — Arrival at St. Louis — The route of Stuart and Crooks.

THE *Tonquin* sailed from Astoria on the 1st of June, 1811, and the little band who were left behind to found the first settlement in the valley of the Columbia set diligently about their task. They enjoyed the good fortune of having commenced their work in the spring with an entire summer in which to prepare for their first winter. Good relations had been established with the tribes, and fortune smiled upon the infant colony. In the midst of their activities two Indians, who turned out to be women attired as men, arrived at the post June 15th bringing definite news of a trading establishment on Spokane river, a branch of the Columbia. A similar rumor had arrived as early as the previous April

to the effect that there were white men in the neighborhood of the Falls, but this story had been proven untrue. Now, however, there could be no doubt that there were white men higher up, nor any doubt that they belonged to the Northwest Company. There at once loomed up before the eyes of the Astorians the gloomy forecast of the inevitable competition which must ensue between them and this formidable rival.

The strength of the Astorians at this time precluded any extensive operations in planting detached posts, but it was resolved at least to oppose the British post on the Spokane, if such there really were, and Mr. David Stuart prepared to carry a party thither. As he was about to depart there arrived at Astoria, July 15th, a canoe manned by nine white men and bearing the British flag. It proved to be a party under David Thompson, a partner in the Northwest Company, whom that company had dispatched the previous year to anticipate Astor on the Columbia. The desertion of most of his party on the east side of the mountains had defeated his plan, but with a few who remained faithful he had crossed the mountains and descended the Columbia to the sea. He was the first white man to explore that river above the point where it was reached by Lewis and Clark.

The presence of Thompson was regarded with much misgiving by most of the partners except McDougal, who not only treated him with great hospitality, but actually equipped him for the return journey. Mr. David Stuart did not approve of this manner of treating competing traders. On the 23d of July Stuart and his party, consisting of four clerks, two voyageurs, and two Sandwich Islanders, set out for their proposed establishment in the interior, accompanied by Mr. Thompson and party. Stuart at length becoming very distrustful of Thompson's sincerity got rid of him by a ruse and pushed on alone. At the mouth of the Snake river they found a British flag attached to a pole and on it a slip of paper laying claim to the country in the name of Great Britain. It would appear by this that the North-

westers were in that country not for the purpose of trade alone. By the very small margin of three months they missed the opportunity of planting the British flag at the mouth of the Columbia. Stuart continued his journey to the mouth of the Okanagan river, five hundred and forty miles above Astoria, and commenced the erection of a trading house there on the 2d of September.

After the sailing of the *Tonquin* and the departure of Stuart and his party work on the establishment at Astoria was continued with vigor. Presently, however, it was directed to another purpose, that of defense, for substantial rumors had gotten afloat that a general attack by the neighboring tribes was impending. A strong palisade was constructed around the quarters, flanked by bastions upon which were mounted four four-pounders. The men were trained daily in the use of their arms, and all preparations were made for a vigorous defense pending the arrival of the overland Astorians or the return of the *Tonquin*. In this last resource, unfortunately, the Astorians were doomed to disappointment, for rumors soon began to arrive from the neighboring Indians of a terrible disaster to the *Tonquin* — nothing less than her capture and destruction by the Indians, and the massacre of her crew. It was on this occasion that McDougal is said to have practiced a piece of sharp strategy on the Indians. The smallpox had ravaged the coast a few years before, and the Indians remembered it with the utmost terror. McDougal assembled the chiefs whom he believed to be in conspiracy against the Astorians, drew forth a bottle, told them that it contained the smallpox, which he could spread among them by simply uncorking the bottle, and threatened to smite them on the first evidence of hostility. The terrified Indians promised peace and kept their word.

On the 26th of September the large house which was to serve as quarters of the company was finished, and about the same time the small schooner also. This vessel was launched with appropriate ceremonies on the 2d of October,

and was christened the *Dolly*, in honor of Mr. Astor's wife. On the 5th of October a party from Stuart's post on the Okanagan arrived, consisting of two clerks and two men. They reported everything satisfactory, and that they had returned only because their services were not needed during the winter, and it was feared that there would not be provisions enough for all. With them came two men, Regis Brugière, a free trapper, with his wife and two children, and an Iroquois hunter, Ignace Shonowane. They had come from the east by the way of the Northwest Company route.

Nothing of especial interest transpired during the remainder of the year. The rainy season set in about the first of October. The Indians withdrew to the interior, and the Astorians were compelled to make considerable use of the *Dolly* in foraging expeditions. A party was dispatched under Robert Stuart to trap on the Willamette, thus opening up that rich and productive region to the white man.

The year thus closed under favorable auspices, and the New Year was welcomed at Astoria with due pomp and ceremony. Eighteen days later Donald McKenzie, Robert McLellan, John Reed, and eight men arrived, and they were followed a little less than a month later by Hunt's party, consisting of thirty-four persons.

On the 22d of March a joint party set out from Astoria for the several purposes of carrying supplies to the post at Okanagan, of visiting Hunt's caches at Snake river, and of carrying dispatches to New York. John Reed was selected to carry the dispatches, and for their better security he sealed them up in a bright tin box, which he strapped upon his person. He was to be accompanied by McLellan, Ben Jones, and two Canadians. Upon arriving at the "Long Narrows" the party suffered a severe attack from the Indians, in which Robert Stuart and McLellan greatly distinguished themselves, and Reed lost his dispatches and almost his life. The bright tin box, by attracting the attention of the Indians, had caused its own loss. One main object of the expedition, viz., the carrying of dispatches to Mr. Astor, being

thus frustrated, the visit to the caches was likewise given up, and the whole party went on to David Stuart's post on the Okanagan, where they arrived on the 24th of April. Four days later they set out to return, accompanied by Stuart, who had conducted a successful winter's trade at Okanagan and at a branch post which he had established on Thompson river. About the 1st of May they met Ramsay Crooks and John Day, who were traveling up the river in sorry plight from their recent despoilment by the Indians. The entire party reached Astoria on the 11th of May.

The day before this there had arrived at Astoria the company's ship, *Beaver*, Captain Cornelius Sowles, which had been dispatched from New York by Mr. Astor, October 10, 1811. Besides an abundant cargo she brought John Clarke, a partner, Ross Cox, Alfred Seton, and four other clerks, quite a number of American and Canadian employes, and several Sandwich Islanders. The arrival of this ship was an important event to the new establishment, for it placed everything on a substantial basis, and gave the enterprise every prospect of a successful issue. This bright gleam of sunshine was not yet for a time to be overclouded by the sinister events which were now transpiring in the busy world outside. A little more than a month later, when all was bustle and activity at Astoria, in preparation for the first systematic trading expedition to the interior, there transpired that event which was to prove the downfall of the enterprise. War was declared by the United States against Great Britain on the 19th of June, 1812.

In formulating their plans for the ensuing year the partners determined that Mr. Hunt should carry out the maritime part of Mr. Astor's enterprise, which related to supplying the Russian posts. This assignment of duty was a great mistake, though possibly an innocent one, on the part of all concerned. It deprived the establishment of the one man who, if any one, could have grappled successfully with the approaching crisis.

On the 29th of June there set out for the interior a large

party of some sixty individuals, charged with the following purposes: David Stuart, with clerks Matthews and McGillis, was to proceed to Okanagan and conduct the trade in that section; John Clarke, with clerks Pillet, McLennan, Farnham, and Cox, was to establish a central post at Spokane, in opposition to the Northwest Company, and subordinate posts among the surrounding tribes; McKenzie, with clerks Seton and Reed, was to establish a post on the Snake river among the Nez Perces, and to secure the goods left in the caches at the Caldron Linn; Robert Stuart, with a small party, was to carry dispatches to New York.

Everything proceeded prosperously and without notable incident, until the various expeditions reached their posts. The several parties separated about the 31st of July, near the mouth of the Walla Walla. David Stuart arrived at Okanagan on the 12th of August, and on the 25th of that month went among the tribe of Indians on Thompson river, where he remained during the winter, leaving Alexander Ross in charge of the post. Clarke arrived at the site of his proposed establishment on the 21st of August, and immediately commenced the construction of a house. The clerks were later dispatched to trade among the various tribes — Farnham and Cox among the Flatheads, McLennan among the Coeur d'Alènes, and Pillet among the Kootenais. McKenzie proceeded up the Snake river to a point not certainly known, but probably near the mouth of the Clearwater river, and after having commenced the establishment of his post, dispatched Reed to Hunt's caches at the Caldron Linn.

The several detachments in the interior carried out their programs without notable adventure, and it will be of importance to note here only one incident, the visit of Reed to the caches. After assisting McKenzie to establish his post, Reed set out for the caches, probably about September 1st, expecting to reach them in twenty days. The first notable incident of the trip was finding at a camp of Shoshone Indians seven men of Hunt's overland party. They were Carson, Delauney, and St. Michael, of the party who had been

detached by Hunt on Snake river October 1, 1811, and Dubreuil, La Chapelle, Turcot, and Landry, who had been left by Crooks in the mountains the preceding winter.

The three men, La Chapelle, Turcot, and Landry, after Crooks had left them, returned to the Snake encampment on the borders of the river. Being destitute of provisions and equipment, they proposed to the Snakes to visit the caches at Caldron Linn. This was done, and six of the nine caches were rifled of their contents. The Indians and the four hunters then went on a grand hunting expedition to the headwaters of the Missouri, where they were set upon by the Blackfeet and robbed of all they possessed. They then returned to the Snake country, where they fell in with Dubreuil, whom Crooks and Day had left in the mountains the preceding March. Soon after this they were joined by Carson, Delauney and St. Michael. These three men, who, with Detayé, had been left by Hunt on Snake river the previous autumn, made a fall and winter hunt in that locality, and went to the Missouri river in the spring of 1812. Here they were attacked by the Crows, who robbed them of everything and killed Detayé. The report of their presence among the Crows found its way to St. Louis that fall through some of Lisa's men, and was forwarded to Mr. Astor in the following January. After this misfortune the survivors went back to the Snake country, where they joined the party of four, as just stated. Delauney had with him an Indian wife, whom he had picked up in his wanderings. Reed, after falling in with these seven men, went on to the caches, where he took what property was left, saw Edward Robinson, received news of Stuart's safe journey thus far, and then returned to McKenzie's post, after an absence of thirty-five days.

It was July 28th that Robert Stuart and his companions arrived at Walla Walla, in company with the large party which left Astoria on the 29th of June for various points in the interior. Stuart at once prepared to set out on his long journey to St. Louis and New York. With him were

Crooks and McLellan, who were tired of the enterprise, and were determined to return home; and also Andri Vallar, Ben Jones, and Francis Leclerc — six in all. John Day, who intended to return, had become violently insane on the way up from Astoria, and it was necessary to send him back. The little party set out from Walla Walla on the 31st of July and, without other incident than that of very hard traveling, arrived, on the 12th of August, on the banks of Snake river, just above the point where it enters the Blue mountains. They followed up the south bank on their way to Caldron Linn. The first incident of importance on this part of the journey was the meeting of a Snake Indian who claimed ownership of Stuart's horse — a fine steed which Stuart desired to take to New York as a present to Mr. Astor. This Indian had been one of Hunt's guides from the mouth of Hoback river to Fort Henry the previous year, and was one of the two men who had been left at the latter place in charge of the horses. From him it was learned that the horses had been stolen, the caches at Caldron Linn robbed, the various hunting parties scattered, and that the survivors were in great distress. The Indian was engaged as a guide, but on the night of August 18th absconded with Stuart's horse.

On the 20th of August the party came upon four of the hunters who had been detached at Fort Henry on the 10th of the preceding October. They were Miller, Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner. They gave to Stuart an account of their wanderings, and a doleful narrative it was. After leaving Fort Henry they went south upwards of two hundred miles and trapped on a river which, they said, discharged itself into the Pacific ocean. It is highly probable that this stream was the present Bear river, Utah, and that these men visited Great Salt Lake. After a successful hunt, they proceeded east for several hundred miles, where they were robbed by a band of Arapahoes. They wintered in this vicinity, and in the following spring were again robbed by the same Indians.

It was about this time that Cass was lost to the party. They told Stuart that he had deserted them in their extremity, taking with him their last remaining horse. It is hardly conceivable that he should thus voluntarily have forfeited the only protection to be found in that remote wilderness, and further doubt is cast upon the story by the fact that Robinson a short time after gave a different version of it to Reed, viz., that Cass had been killed in one of the affairs with the Arapahoes. Uncharitable individuals believed that he had been killed by his companions to allay the cravings of hunger, but of this there is no evidence, and the general good character of the four survivors precludes the possibility of believing it.

The hunters then proceeded westwardly during the spring and summer, becoming reduced to abject want, and when found were on the very brink of starvation and were subsisting upon fish.

Stuart's augmented party now proceeded to the Caldron Linn, where they arrived on the 29th of August. They found six of the nine caches robbed, and after taking from those remaining the things they needed, they closed them up, pending the expected arrival of Reed. Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner concluded to try their luck again, and were accordingly outfitted for another hunt. Miller decided to leave the country.

The party, numbering seven after the accession of Miller, left the Caldron Linn on the 1st of September, and continued up the river. On the 7th they abandoned the river, striking off to the southeast under the guidance of Miller, and on the 9th reached Bear river, to which Stuart gave the name Miller. Continuing up the river until the 12th, they encountered a band of Crows, who stayed with them that night and displayed a decided inclination to give them trouble. The party got away successfully, however, on the 13th, but left the river, which here flows from the south, and turned off due east over the mountains. Coming upon a considerable tributary flowing from the north, they abandoned

their eastern course and ascended its valley. It was here that the great mistake of the returning overland expedition was committed. The party had so far followed practically what was afterward the Oregon Trail. They could scarcely have improved upon it, except in the smaller details. But being wholly unacquainted with the country, they fancied that Miller had led them too far south and away off from their proper course. Moreover, that indescribable bewilderment which is expressed by the word "lost," and which only those who have lost their bearings in a wild and unsettled country can appreciate, had come upon the party, and their great desire now was to get back to Hunt's route and follow it to the Missouri. It is difficult to conceive the state of mind which could lead men to such a pass of absurdity as is indicated by their route for the next month. The reader should examine the map and note the camping places of the 13th of September and the 20th of October. They are scarcely six days' journey apart, and the passage would have been made in that time, had not these bewildered overlanders forgotten that the sun rises in the east.

Having decided to regain Hunt's route, they traveled north up the stream they were then on, over a divide to what is now Salt river, and down that stream to the Snake, which they reached nearly where the present boundary line between Wyoming and Utah crosses the river. They arrived here on the 18th of September. The next morning they were robbed of all their horses by the very band of Crows whom they had lately met on Bear river. The party, now without horses, set out *down* Snake river, as if on their way back to Astoria. If they had gone up stream they would have struck Hunt's trail at the mouth of Hoback river, within a distance of twenty-five to thirty miles. On the second day they built a raft and undertook to cross to the north shore. Finding that it floated well they remained in the stream for nearly a week, and made in all, from the mouth of Salt river, about one hundred and ten miles of retrograde course.

Having now passed the main part of the range of moun-

tains along the right bank, and judging the passage to be easy, they concluded to leave the river and cross into the valley of Pierre's Hole, through which Hunt had passed the preceding autumn. They were very apprehensive of danger from the Blackfeet and took extra precautions not to attract the attention of any bands that might be in the vicinity. One of these precautionary measures was to pass over a high hill or mountain that they might more easily have passed around, but would have exposed themselves to parties in the plain below. McLellan, tired out with the hardships of the journey, flatly refused to undergo this extra labor. He struck off alone around the base of the mountain, and was not seen for thirteen days afterward.

The following night, October 1st, Crooks was taken seriously ill, and the party remained in camp in Pierre's Hole for four days. On the 5th the journey was resumed along Hunt's old route, who must have passed this point almost exactly a year before. The party continued their way on the difficult route by which they had come and which was particularly precipitous and dangerous along Hoback river. On the 12th they reached Green river and descended that stream for a distance. The next day they overtook McLellan, whom they found ready to give up in despair. None of the party had had anything to eat for upwards of three days, and so great was their hunger that it led one of them, Leclerc, to propose to Stuart at the evening encampment that lots should be cast to see which should be killed for the salvation of the rest. The fellow was so persistent that Stuart was obliged to threaten his life if he did not desist.

The following day fortune favored the party with an old buffalo bull, which perhaps saved them from starvation. They did not follow Green river far, but bore off in the direction of the Wind River mountains and took a general southeasterly course along the base of this range. In their progress away from the river they crossed a large Indian trail, probably the regular highway down Green river valley. They kept on their way with fair progress, having picked

up some game en route, and on the 18th of October luckily came upon a camp of about a hundred Snake Indians, from whom they secured a quantity of provisions and a horse. From these Indians they learned that a large band of Crows were encamped to the east of the mountains in a river valley, probably that of the Sweetwater, in Wyoming.

Setting out next morning they soon came again upon the large Indian trail which they had crossed some days before, and as it led in their direction they followed it the rest of the day and part of the next. But early on the 20th they found that it turned abruptly to the northeast, and as they feared to get any closer to the party that had passed along it, they abandoned it and kept on to the southeast. It is probable that at this point they were again on the line of the Oregon Trail of later years, and had they followed the Indian Trail, they would that day have discovered and crossed the celebrated South Pass, which holds so conspicuous a place in the history of the West.

Turning east on the 21st of October the little party continued for five days over the barren and desolate wastes just south of the Sweetwater mountains, Wyoming, meeting with no incident of special interest. On the 26th they turned to the northeast, and after passing through a gap in the mountains found themselves in a beautiful open valley and on the willowed banks of a strong, clear mountain stream, none other than the Sweetwater river. Here they spent the following day, hunting buffalo. Resuming their course on the 27th, they wound their way slowly down the plentiful valley, passing the sites of what later were known as the Devil's Gate and Independence Rock, and arrived on the 30th at the main stream of the North Platte. During the following day they passed that sublime and august natural formation now known as the Upper Platte cañon, but which, from the red color of the rocks and the turbulent condition of the river below, they named the "Fiery Narrows."

The river in this part of its course bore so strongly to the

northeast that the travelers were led quite astray in their conjectures as to its identity. It did not seem possible to them that it could be the Platte, and they concluded that it must be the Cheyenne or Niobrara, or some other stream in that general direction. This erroneous conclusion and the increasing evidences of approaching winter led the explorers into their second serious mistake, that of deciding to go into winter quarters without attempting to reach St. Louis that fall. It was still only the end of October, and in all the section of country which they were to traverse, the months of November and December are, for the most part, months of pleasant weather. They could easily have reached the Missouri by the middle of December and St. Louis by the end of the year, or soon after, thus saving four months' time. They decided, however, to go into winter quarters, and accordingly, having come upon a fine bend of the river with a beautiful wooded bottom, which afforded shelter and protection against storms, with abundant promise of game, they commenced the construction of a cabin on the 2nd of November.¹

For the next six weeks everything moved off prosperously. The location fully satisfied their expectations, and their new cabin was soon hung full of wholesome buffalo meat, a sure guarantee against the danger of starvation. But alas! in the midst of this apparent security, they were visited one morning by the same band of Arapahoes who had robbed Miller and his party the previous year. The Indians hung around for two days, and although they committed no violence to speak of, they succeeded in getting nearly all the little party's supply of meat. After their departure it was resolved to abandon the place at once, inasmuch as their security there was at an end. They accordingly set out down the river on the 13th of December. They found traveling, after their repose and comfort, very annoying, particularly

¹This was the first building within the limits of the present state of Wyoming. The site was in the beautiful bottom half enclosed by a great bend of the river opposite the mouth of Poison Spider creek.

as the ground was now covered with snow. They continued, nevertheless, for two weeks, having traveled by their estimate three hundred and thirty miles, when they found themselves entirely out of the mountains and upon the prairies below. Rightly judging this time that they were upon the Platte, and that at so late a season of the year it would be extremely perilous to undertake to reach the Missouri, they determined to retrograde until they should find a suitable place to go into winter quarters again. They went back for three days over an estimated distance of seventy-seven miles, and having found a suitable camping ground, went into quarters again on the 30th of December, 1812. Here they remained undisturbed until spring. This situation was about where Wellesville, Nebraska, now stands.

During the winter they constructed some canoes, and on the 8th of March broke up their encampment and started for the Missouri. They made very little progress for the first twelve days and had to abandon their canoes almost at the outset.

The party were well on their way again by the 20th of March and proceeded without notable incident until the 13th of April, when they arrived at the village of the Oto Indians, already familiar ground to Crooks and McLellan. Here they first learned of the existence of war with Great Britain. They now traded their horse for a canoe, and on the morning of April 16th resumed their journey. On the 18th they entered the Missouri, and having found soon after a deserted canoe, larger and better than their own, they took possession of it. They stopped for a short time at Fort Osage and arrived at St. Louis "in perfect health and fine spirits" on the 30th of April, 1813.

Their arrival made a great sensation in the little town, for nothing definite had been heard from Mr. Hunt's party for nearly two years. The *Missouri Gazette* chronicled the event with a brief reference to their impressions of the trip

and in its issue of May 15th published quite a lengthy account of their journey and of the loss of the *Tonquin*.²

This overland journey consumed three hundred and six days, as against three hundred and forty days on Hunt's journey. If we deduct the time uselessly lost in the absurd northern detour from Bear river to Snake river and the time spent in winter quarters, and lost in the attempt to navigate the Platte, that actually consumed on the journey will be found to have been only one hundred and eighty days, and the party should have reached St. Louis by Christmas of 1812.

The route pursued on the return journey was, with three exceptions, that of the Oregon Trail of later years. Stuart's party kept south of Snake river, instead of crossing and following the line of the Bois . They also missed the line from Bear river to the Devil's Gate, although near it a good deal of the way. From Grand Island to the mouth of the Kansas they followed the rivers, instead of crossing the angle between them, as the Trail did afterward. All of these variations from the true route would have been avoided on another journey. The two Astorian expeditions, therefore, are entitled to the credit of having practically opened up the Oregon Trail from the Missouri river at the mouth of the Kansas to the mouth of the Columbia river.

²These articles were the first public account of the Astorian expedition. That relating to the overland journeys was reprinted in the Appendix of the Journals of Bradbury and Brackenridge. The account of the loss of the *Tonquin* has never been reproduced until in the present work. See Appendix C.

CHAPTER XII.

ASTORIA.

THE COURSE OF EVENTS ON THE COLUMBIA.

News of the outbreak of war — Action of McKenzie and McDougal — Partners return from the interior — Manifesto of the partners — Hunt returns to Astoria and immediately departs again — Arrival of the Northwest brigade — Sea-farings of Mr. Hunt — His delay at the Russian establishments — Sails to the Sandwich Islands — Captain Sowles' conduct at Canton — Hunt sails to Astoria in the *Albatross* — Returns to Sandwich Islands — The *Lark* wrecked — Hunt returns to Astoria in the *Pedler* — Hunt's arrangement with McDougal — Sale of Astoria — Arrival of the *Raccoon* — Astoria rechristened Fort George — Closing scenes at Astoria — Home journey of the Astorians — Departure of the Northwest brigade — Sad fate of John Reed's party.

MR. HUNT, the chief partner, having sailed from the Columbia, and Crooks and McLellan having returned to the United States, the control of affairs at Astoria fell upon Duncan McDougal, and the whole enterprise on the Columbia was practically in the hands of British subjects. They were good, energetic men, however, and in ordinary times would have been as serviceable to the establishment as any one else. The summer and fall of 1812 passed away prosperously both at Astoria and at the detached posts with the exception of McKenzie's. In the midst of this promising outlook, as in an unclouded sky, a menace of impending doom appeared like a black cloud gathering on the horizon. McKenzie, from the time when he was superseded by Hunt, had been out of sympathy with the enterprise. His establishment on Snake river among the Nez Perce Indians did not satisfy him for some reason, and he concluded to remove it to another point. Before

doing so he decided to visit Clarke at Spokane and get his advice. While at Clarke's post, some time in December, John George McTavish and Joseph La Roque of the Northwest Company arrived, bringing news of the Declaration of War, and stating that the armed ship *Isaac Todd* was expected at the mouth of the Columbia in the following March. McKenzie did not wait to secure the advice of Clarke, but without consulting him went back to his post, broke up the establishment, cached his goods, and with all his people set out for Astoria, where he arrived January 15, 1813.¹

McKenzie and McDougal concluded that war had made the situation hopeless, and after a sort of council of war, at which the clerks were silent witnesses, they determined to abandon the enterprise in the following spring and return across the mountains. Some time during the month of March following, McKenzie set out for the interior with Seton and Reed to visit the caches at his late establishment, and to inform Clarke and Stuart of the action taken at Astoria. At a point not far above the Dalles he met a party in two canoes en route for Astoria, under the command of John George McTavish. The two parties passed a jovial and companionable night together, quite unlike the relations of competing traders, and in the morning took their respective ways. When McKenzie arrived at the caches he found them robbed. He at once commenced search for the property and in the meanwhile sent Reed to Spokane and Okanagan with letters from McDougal. McKenzie, after a great deal of trouble, succeeded in recovering most of his stolen property as well as in purchasing a large number of horses. Having accomplished these purposes he repaired to Walla Walla, the agreed rendezvous of the wintering partners before returning to Astoria. Stuart and Clarke joined him there by the 4th of June. The joint party set

¹ It was at this time that the seven men whom Reed picked up on his way to the caches arrived at Astoria—the last of the overland Astorians to complete the journey.

out for Astoria on the 5th and arrived at that place on the 14th with the returns of the winter's trade. Already those from the Willamette had been received.

Upon the arrival of the partners at Astoria the situation of affairs was seriously considered, McKenzie and McDougal being in favor of abandoning the enterprise, and Clarke and Stuart opposing it. The vehement appeals of McKenzie finally carried the day, and Clarke and Stuart reluctantly joined in signing, July 1, 1813, a manifesto which set forth the reasons for abandonment. These were briefly that the non-arrival of the *Beaver* had left them without supplies, while the existence of war rendered their arrival in the future doubtful; that the interior trade had not come up to their expectations; and that they were not able to withstand the competition of the powerful Northwest Company. It was decided to abandon the undertaking the 1st of June, 1814. In the meanwhile Messrs. Clarke and Stuart were to return to their posts for the winter, Reed was to go to the Snake country, and McKenzie to the valley of the Willamette. The post of Spokane was sold to the Northwest Company, and three of the clerks, Ross, Cox, and McLennan, entered the service of that company.

McTavish, who had now been at Astoria for nearly three months, engaged to send dispatches across the country to Astor. McDougal sold him the necessary provisions, and he and Laroque set out with Cox on the 5th of July, accompanied by Clarke, Stuart, and Reed as far as to their respective points of divergence. The parties arrived safely at their destinations. Laroque and Cox, who had been entrusted with the dispatches for the east, had reached the point where they were to leave the Columbia and cross the mountains, when on September 2nd they were met by the Northwest Brigade under John Stuart and Joseph McGillivray, who were on their way to Astoria, armed with full powers to treat for the purchase of the Pacific Fur Company. Cox and Laroque accordingly turned back and the whole party arrived at Astoria October 7th.

In the meanwhile Mr. Hunt had returned to Astoria after a year's absence. Finding that the course of events had already gone so far that he could not change it, he made the necessary arrangements with Mr. McDougal for closing up Mr. Astor's affairs on the Columbia. He remained at Astoria only a week, arriving August 21st, and departing August 26th for the purpose of securing a ship in which to take away Mr. Astor's property and to transport the Sandwich Islanders home.

On the 2nd of October following, McKenzie started for the interior to carry the news of the arrangement with Mr. Hunt and to bring down the Sandwich Islanders. Three days later he met the Northwest Brigade and returned with it to Astoria.

It is now necessary to see what Mr. Hunt was doing all this time, and to follow his ubiquitous wanderings over the Pacific ocean by which he was kept away from Astoria when the fate of the enterprise on the Columbia was being decided. Mr. Hunt sailed in the *Beaver* August 4, 1812, to carry out Mr. Astor's plans of trade with the Russian Fur Company, although it is very evident that Mr. Astor would scarcely have wished to have Mr. Hunt the individual to take charge of it. He understood too well the importance of having that gentleman at Astoria. But it was decided otherwise by the partners, and perhaps none of the others were qualified for that kind of an undertaking. Mr. Hunt sailed to New Archangel, arriving there on the 19th of August, 1812, armed with Mr. Astor's arrangement with the Russian government and company. Although the commandant of the post had no apparent objections to the arrangement and willingly received the goods, he was so intolerably procrastinating in bringing the business to an end that a month and a half elapsed before Hunt could get away. A still further delay was caused by the method of payment, which was made in seal skins, and as there happened to be none at the establishment, the ship was obliged to proceed to the distant island of St. Paul on the confines of Behring sea

to get them. Here she was driven off in a storm while Mr. Hunt was on shore, and did not reappear for several days.

It was the middle of November before the *Beaver* was ready to leave the island — two weeks later than the agreed time when Mr. Hunt was to be back at Astoria. Instead of making all haste to return he permitted himself to be dissuaded by the timid counsel of Captain Sowles, whose faults were the exact opposite of those of Captain Thorn of the *Tonquin*. The condition of the ship after the late storm would not in his judgment permit an attempt to enter the Columbia until she was repaired, and he therefore urged, with a great deal of persistency, that she be allowed to proceed to the Sandwich Islands. As that would make it too late to return to Astoria and then reach Canton in time for the markets there, it was thought that Mr. Hunt could wait at the Islands for the next annual ship.

It is not an easy thing to overrule a captain who says that his ship is unseaworthy and must be repaired, and Mr. Hunt was not the man to take that kind of responsibility. So away to the Sandwich Islands went the *Beaver*, where she was put in repair and then sailed for Canton January 1, 1813. Arrived at Canton Captain Sowles exhibited the same timid policy that kept him away from Astoria. He received word from Mr. Astor announcing the existence of war, and directing him to proceed at once to Astoria. He replied that he would await in Canton the arrival of peace and then return home. He failed to dispose of the furs, although offered prices which, if invested in Canton goods, would have netted the company a quarter of a million dollars profit in New York. Compliance with Mr. Astor's orders and the exercise of common business sense might have saved the day at Astoria; for such a brilliant financial beginning to the maritime part of the enterprise would have ensured ample support to the Astorians as soon as the war should cease.

Mr. Hunt found that he might as well be a prisoner in the hands of an enemy as where he now was, so far as any assist-

ance he could render to the company was concerned. Month after month dragged by and still no annual ship. Finally on the 20th of June, 1813, the ship *Albatross* came from China bearing the first news which Hunt had received of the war. He now concluded that this was why the ship had not come, and as he feared that the Astorians might be running short of supplies, he chartered the *Albatross*, loaded her with what he could get in the Islands, and sailed for the Columbia. He arrived at Astoria August 20th, one year and sixteen days after he had left.

Great was his astonishment and chagrin when he learned what had happened, but he found that he was too late to reverse the course of events, particularly as he himself had nothing to show for his own work, and had so completely failed to keep his engagement. He was compelled to acquiesce in the proceedings of the partners and it now became necessary for him to take measures to close up Mr. Astor's affairs. In order to ship the furs collected, and return the Sandwich Islanders to their home, it was necessary to secure another vessel, the *Albatross* not being available. Mr. Hunt accordingly left Astoria a week after his arrival. The *Albatross* was bound first for the Marquesas Islands and then for the Sandwich Islands. At the Marquesas Hunt first learned of the near approach of a British war vessel and gave up all hope of even saving Mr. Astor's property. On his arrival at the Sandwich Islands he found to his astonishment that Mr. Astor had sent out the regular annual ship and that she had come prosperously on her way until near the Sandwich Islands, where she was wrecked in a tempest. The hulk, with the captain and some of the crew, drifted to the Islands, and were there when Mr. Hunt arrived. The latter at once purchased a brig called the *Pedler*, put Captain Northrup of the wrecked ship, *Lark*, in charge, and sailed for Astoria to carry out the orders which Mr. Astor had sent by the ship. These were to remove the company's property as speedily as possible to the Russian settlements to avoid capture, and

await the cessation of hostilities. Mr. Hunt reached Astoria February 28th, 1814.

The arrangement between Hunt and McDougal, when Hunt sailed in the *Albatross*, August 26th, was that McDougal should have power to transfer to the Northwest Company, with proper security for arrears of wages, the services of such men as desired to remain. The property belonging to the company was to be protected until Hunt should return for it, and in the meanwhile the Islanders were to be collected and such employes as preferred to leave were to be ready. McDougal was given power to take such measures to carry out these arrangements as might be found necessary.

It was on the 7th of October that the Northwest Brigade arrived at Astoria with full power to negotiate for the purchase of Astoria. Clarke was with them, having sold the post at Spokane. McKenzie, who had set out for the interior five days before, to carry the news of the arrangements between Hunt and McDougal, was also with them. Negotiations for the transfer of Astoria were at once set on foot, and so far as the record goes, were not limited to the post and appurtenances, but embraced the furs and property which Mr. Hunt expected to take away. So briskly did these negotiations move that an agreement was reached on the 16th of October and was signed, according to Franchère, on the 23rd.²

²Ross is our authority for the statement that the sale was not actually consummated by transfer of invoices and receipts for some time afterward. The shrewd Northwesters, not satisfied with having driven their rivals out of the country, or with having secured at a fraction of their value the furs and other property of the company, hoped to improve the bargain by getting the property for nothing at all. A British ship of war was momentarily expected and should one arrive before the transfer was actually made, the post and all its property would be captured. It was only on the threat of a resort to extreme measures by McKenzie and McDougal that McTavish consummated the bargain on the 12th of November.

Irving and Franchère make no note of such a proceeding as this and the probabilities are all against it, for in case of capture the property

The whole proceeding was viewed with shame and indignation by the American contingent and by a number of the Canadians as well. They felt that there was no real necessity for the action taken, for, with the transfer of the post, the property which belonged in so large part to British subjects would be respected. But they were in a hopeless minority, with no voice in the councils and no power to stay the course of events.

On the 29th of October a large party set out for the interior to make a transfer of the various posts and of the property at each. Nothing of note transpired at Astoria, except the arrival on November 23rd of Alexander Stuart and Alexander Henry,³ until the 30th of that month, when the long expected war vessel hove in sight. It was the *Raccoon* of twenty-six guns, commanded by Captain Black. This vessel with the *Isaac Todd*, the frigate *Phoebe*, and sloop of war *Cherub*, had sailed from Rio Janeiro on the 6th of July preceding with John McDonald, a partner of the Northwest Company, on board. The *Isaac Todd* had become separated from her company off Cape Horn, and had not since been seen. The other vessels arrived safely at the agreed rendezvous at the island of Juan Fernandez, and after waiting some time for the *Isaac Todd*, and hearing of the havoc which the American Commodore Porter was making among the British whalers, it was decided that the *Raccoon* should go on alone with McDonald to Astoria, and that the other vessels should cruise after Porter. The *Raccoon* arrived in due time within the mouth of the Columbia.

The officers and crew of the *Raccoon* had been led to suppose that a valuable prize awaited them at the end of

would have been a prize of war and the Northwesters would not have been entitled to it. It was certainly to their advantage to secure it before any such eventuality. That they made use of the war ship argument to drive a good bargain is very probable.

³ Henry's Journals, recently made public through the editorial labors of Dr. Elliott Coues, have furnished valuable new light upon the closing scenes at Astoria.

their long cruise. When they found that the post and property had been sold to British subjects they were greatly chagrined and disappointed. Captain Black, it is said, even threatened to bring suit for their recovery, but the threat, if made, was not carried out.

If Captain Black was crestfallen at losing a valuable prize, he was disgusted when he beheld the character of the fort which he had been sent half way around the world to capture. He exclaimed with ill-concealed contempt: "Is this the fort about which I have heard so much talking? D—n me, but I'd batter it down in two hours with a four pounder!"

Captain Black, with a retinue of officers, landed at Astoria late on the night of December 12th, and after dinner on the 13th he took formal possession of the fort in the name of the British king, and rechristened it Fort George. The disappointed captain, could he have foreseen the future, would not have felt ashamed of this day of small things. He had done what no British sailor had ever done before: in taking possession of this fort he had saved an empire to his country.⁴

Thus ended the eventful career of Astoria. It now remains only to see how the various individuals connected with the enterprise made their dispositions for the immediate future. A large number, including McDougal, entered the service of the new company. Others refused offers of service and among them Franchère, who had never ceased to regard the downfall of Astoria as a catastrophe which was wholly unnecessary.⁵

The *Raccoon* left the Columbia on the last day of the year and Mr. Hunt arrived with the brig *Pedler* on the 28th of February, 1814. He was indignant at the conduct of McDougal, but in this case, as before, the march of events during his absence had carried the business beyond his

⁴For the significance of this statement see Chapter XIII., this Part.

⁵Franchère did take temporary service while waiting an opportunity to return home.

power to remedy it. He now found that he had no property to carry away, and all that he could do was to secure the papers of the late company, and, with such of the Astorians as desired to accompany him, to bid a final adieu to the coast which he did so much to forfeit to his country. He left the Columbia April 3rd, 1814.

Messrs. Alfred Seton, J. C. Halsey, Bernard Clapp, and Russell Farnham sailed on the *Pedler*, which was taken first to Sitka and Kamchatka to close up some business there, and thence made her way toward home. She was captured on the coast of California and held for upwards of two months. Nothing further is known of her voyage nor how Mr. Hunt got home. Of the other passengers Halsey was landed at Sitka and drops out of sight. Farnham was landed at Kamchatka and sent overland with dispatches to Mr. Astor. He made the astonishing journey across Asia and Europe and in due time reached New York. He will again appear in our narrative in a more prosperous connection. Clapp left the ship at the Marquesas Islands, "where he entered the service of his country as midshipman under Commodore Porter" (Franchère). Alfred Seton was put off at San Blas on the California coast to make his way home by land. He went to Darien, where he was detained several months by sickness. He finally reached Carthagena, where, in great destitution, he appealed to the commander of a British squadron lying there, and was by him hospitably received. After a time he was landed at Jamaica, whence he made his way to New York. He subsequently achieved great business success and he will again appear in these pages as the capitalist behind Captain Bonneville's enterprise.

On the 4th of April, 1814, the day after the *Pedler* left the Columbia, the Northwest Brigade set out for the east, taking along such of the Astorians as desired to return home by land. Of this number was Gabriel Franchère, who reached home September 2nd.

There is only one other incident connected with the As-

torian enterprise which may detain us. When the Northwest Brigade was nearing the Walla Walla on the 17th of April, they were startled by a child's voice crying out in French, "Arrêtez donc! Arrêtez donc!" A canoe party was sent to shore and found that it was the squaw of Pierre Dorion and her two children. From her they received a tale of horror which was a fitting finale to the tragedy of Astoria.

On the 5th of July, 1813, John Reed left Astoria with the large party that set out for the interior that day, his destination being the country of the Snake river, where he was to trap during the winter and collect as many horses as possible for the overland expedition of the following spring. With him were Giles Leclerc, François Landry, Jean Baptiste Turcot, Andre La Chapelle, Pierre Dorion and family, and Pierre Delauny. Late in September he was joined by those hardy hunters, Hoback, Robinson, and Rezner, who here come to sight for the last time.

Reed finally located for the winter on what is now Boise river, Idaho, long known to fur traders as Reed's river. During the autumn three men were lost from one cause or another. Delauny left the party and was never again heard from, and was probably killed by the Indians. Landry fell from his horse and was killed. Turcot died of King's Evil. Late in the year Rezner, Dorion, and Leclerc went about five days' march from Reed's house, where they put up a hut and commenced a prosperous trapping campaign. One evening, about January 10th, Leclerc staggered into the house desperately wounded, and told Dorion's squaw that her husband and Rezner were killed. She at once caught two horses, put Leclerc on one of them, and herself and two children on the other and started for Reed's house. On the third day Leclerc died. When the Indian woman reached Reed's house it was only to find that the rest of the party had likewise been slain. She at once summoned all her energies and started for the Columbia. She forded the

Snake river and got as far as to the Blue mountains, but could not cross at that season. With marvelous resource she maintained herself during the winter, but the imminence of starvation at length compelled her to move. She made her way with great suffering to Walla Walla, and was on her way down the Columbia when she was met by the Northwest Brigade.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASTORIA.

REVIEW OF THE ENTERPRISE.

National significance of the Astorian enterprise—Feasibility of general plan—Lack of overland connection—Astor and the St. Louis traders—Large proportion of British subjects—Unfortunate choice of partners—Criticism of Hunt—Criticism of McKenzie—Criticism of McDougal—No necessity for abandoning Astoria—Responsibility of the United States—Northwest Company exonerated.

THE world never ceases to linger over those decisive events in its history which have deflected the current of human affairs and have influenced for better or worse the welfare of mankind. It matters not that their issues are settled forever; none the less do men love to speculate upon their causes and results and to enquire what would have ensued had their outcome been other than it was. Among these decisive events, though in itself of little moment, and scarcely noticed among the great transactions of that important period, must be placed the enterprise of Mr. Astor upon the Pacific coast. It is no flight of fancy, but rather a sober and legitimate conclusion, to say that if the Astorian enterprise had succeeded the course of empire on the American continent would have been altogether different than it has been. With the valley of the Columbia and the neighboring shores of the Pacific occupied by American citizens instead of British subjects during the period of controversy over the Oregon Question, no part of the Pacific coast line would now belong to Great Britain.

That such has not been the case is less a matter of regret than it would have been had a different civilization found

its abode there. It is at least a satisfaction to see in that country a people of our own race and language, no less earnest than we in carrying forward the cause of constitutional government and commercial development into regions of unknown extent and unmeasured possibilities. Nevertheless Americans will never cease to regret the outcome of this affair, nor to feel that it was not what it should have been; and they will always welcome any new light which may exhibit more clearly the causes of its failure, and determine more surely where the responsibility for it ought to rest.

In reviewing the enterprise of the Pacific Fur Company after the lapse of nearly a century, the general plan upon which it was based stands above criticism. It was a project no less feasible than magnificent. Although its course was one of almost uniform disaster, its very failures showed that under normal conditions its success would have excelled the anticipations of its great promoter. He had proposed well, but God and man, with tempest and war, had disposed in a way which he could scarcely have imagined possible.

In the execution of the project Mr. Astor committed certain errors both in the plan of his expeditions and the personnel of his company. It is evident that he should have laid more stress upon his overland connection with St. Louis, particularly in view of the danger of war. It would seem to have been only a measure of common prudence to have established a secure line of operations which the navy of Great Britain could not touch. Had he known as we do that he could easily have gone from St. Louis to the mouth of the Columbia with merchandise in three months, his neglect of this route would indeed have been culpable. To be sure Crooks and Stuart brought back favorable reports of the possibility of this route, but it was evidently not then believed to be as practicable as it really was. Its importance was not, however, entirely overlooked by Mr. Astor, who at one time contemplated sending another expedition overland, but for some reason never did it.

It may be wondered why Mr. Astor did not try to interest St. Louis traders in his schemes, and it is impossible not to feel that he would have been better off with Ashley, Henry, or Manuel Lisa in charge of his affairs than with McDougal, McKenzie, or even Hunt. The truth is that most of the St. Louis traders were afraid of the proposed connection. They wanted a *Missouri* Fur Company, with the trade all to themselves, and, with a narrow provincialism which does them little credit, they refused a share in their trade to Mr. Astor, but kept on for twenty years in a sickly and failing business, only to fall at last into the very hands which might have saved them from their early disasters.¹

The second point in which it is manifest that Mr. Astor acted contrary to sound judgment, even with only the light that he then had, was in choosing the personnel of his company. It is easy to understand why he turned his eye to the north to find suitable men. At Montreal, or in the service of its great fur company, was to be found the highest experience which the fur trade afforded. If union with that company could not be effected, and it could not, it might at least be possible to secure some of its servants to carry on an independent enterprise. Some of them in fact had not been satisfied with recent treatment by their company, and were ready to join any opposition. Mr. Astor, who had often visited Montreal, had conceived a high opinion of the talent and business methods of the Northwest traders, and even of the rank and file in the company's service. He is said by Ross to have remarked on the occasion of a display of skill in handling a canoe by two Canadian boatmen, that six Americans could not have done so well. Very different was the estimate of relative worth which obtained in the Far West. There one American hunter was rated as equal

¹ That such is the true explanation of Mr. Astor's failure to establish himself at St. Louis may readily be seen from the letters of Charles Gratiot, who long tried to get him to establish a house in St. Louis, and tried to persuade the Missouri Fur Company to give him a share in their business.

to three Creole voyageurs. It is apparent that Mr. Astor as yet imperfectly appreciated the worth of the American trader and trapper, and could not bring himself to consider either as an adequate substitute for "*un homme du Nord.*" Therefore he was led to organize his parties largely on the northern frontier instead of at St. Louis, and to compose them mainly of British subjects.

Had peace continued all would have been well. But it was a decisive error to man his expeditions and compose his company from the subjects of a nation with which the United States was then believed to be on the verge of war. Of the thirty-three company men who sailed on the *Tonquin*, the four partners were all subjects of Great Britain, as were eight of the eleven clerks, and fifteen of the eighteen subordinate employes whose names are given by Franchère. Of those who went with the overland expedition, omitting Crooks, McLellan, and Miller who immediately returned, one partner, Hunt, was an American, and one, McKenzie, a resident of Canada; the clerk, Reed, was an Irishman, although probably an American citizen, while the rank and file who reached Astoria were by a great majority Canadians. The *Beaver* brought one partner, Clarke, an American, although he had long been affiliated with the Northwest Company, and six clerks, of whom only one appears to have been a foreigner, but two of whom must have left Astoria at an early day, as there is not the slightest mention of their presence there. When the fate of Astoria hung in the balance, and was decided by the vote of the four partners present, three of them, McDougal, McKenzie, and Stuart, were British subjects, and McDougal held Mr. Astor's proxy which gave him the determining vote. Of the clerks then on the *Columbia*, the Canadians outnumbered the Americans by two to one; while of the subordinate employes the disproportion was even greater.

It is obvious enough that in the event of war with Great Britain the same loyal support to an American company as against a British company could not be expected from

British subjects as from American citizens. It is no reflection upon the Canadian Astorians to say this, for simple patriotism could mean no less. War was foreseen at the time that Mr. Astor selected his associates. Two of them, it was afterwards learned, so clearly foresaw its approach that they called upon the British minister at New York to learn what their position would be in case that eventuality should actually ensue. Mr. Astor could not have been blind to the course of events, and common prudence should have led him to trust his enterprise only to the hands of his fellow citizens, or at least to have made it impossible for foreigners to have a majority vote in the councils of his far distant establishment. Fortunate for him would it have been if, in the trying hour of his cherished enterprise, he could have repeated the command which tradition ascribes to Washington — "Put none but Americans on guard to-night." With Americans on guard the pusillanimous action of McDougal and McKenzie in the winter of 1812-13 would not have taken place. With Americans on guard the various parties of Northwesters would not have been received as brothers, but as competing traders, and treated with the scant business indulgence which that shrewd company knew so well how to dispense to its opponents. With Americans on guard the post at Spokane would not have been sold when there was no necessity for it; the manifesto of July 13, 1813, would never have been signed; John George McTavish would not have been permitted to linger with his retainers under the guns of Astoria waiting for a British ship of war; and the shameful bargain of McDougal with McTavish and Stuart of October 16, 1813, would not have been concluded. The fact that Americans were not on guard is the one severe indictment against the management of the Astorian enterprise which will be sustained at the bar of history.

Even leaving out considerations of nationality, Mr. Astor's choice of partners was not a happy one. McDougal, McKenzie, and Hunt did not prove good men in their

respective places. Captains Thorn and Sowles were unfortunate selections as ship masters. But such is the experience of every new undertaking. It takes time to learn men and to settle them in their proper places. A few years' service would have corrected these errors and have adjusted each part of the intricate machine to its proper work. Unfortunately this time was not to be had.

Of Mr. Hunt's share in the enterprise not much can be said in commendation except that he was loyal and single-hearted to Mr. Astor throughout. He was not the man for the place. His conduct of the overland expedition was not efficient and he should have been in Astoria in midsummer of 1811 instead of midwinter of 1811-12. Permitting himself to be sent on the maritime expedition was a fatal error, for it took away from the establishment the only partner whose sympathies were unquestionably on the side of the company. He not only allowed himself to be sent away, but he afterward deliberately kept himself away for more than a year, by which time the fate of Astoria was sealed.

McKenzie, Hunt's overland associate, was an able, but unscrupulous man, who could be a powerful enemy or ally, according to his mood. Unluckily he had from the start been soured on the enterprise on account of what he thought an unjust precedence given by Mr. Astor to Hunt. He never had any heart in his work. His establishment was the only one that failed, and he was the first one to lose faith in the undertaking.

Of Duncan McDougal, who held the reins of authority at Astoria during Mr. Hunt's absence, the common verdict is that he was not only unfit for the place but disloyal to his duty. Even his apologist, Ross, admits his unfitness and characterizes him as "a man of but ordinary capacity, with an irritable, peevish temper; the most unfit man in the world to head an expedition or command men." Inasmuch as the suspicion of disloyalty to the company has always attached to his conduct at Astoria, although he strenuously main-

tained his innocence, it will be worth while to examine the evidence for and against.

From the first McDougal treated the parties of the Northwest Fur Company with a degree of hospitality wholly uncalled for and wholly contrary to the teachings of the school in which he had been brought up. Instead of allowing them only the scant courtesy which common hospitality requires, and giving them plainly to understand that their presence could not be tolerated, he treated them more like associates, distributing favors with a lavish hand, selling them provisions, and permitting them to spy out whatever was going on or in contemplation. This course was noted with disapproval by the other partners and members of the establishment. Ross says of the visit of Thompson, in July, 1811: "McDougal received him like a brother; nothing was too good for Mr. Thompson; he had access everywhere; saw and examined everything, and whatever he asked for he got as if he had been one of ourselves." Small wonder that the people of Astoria regarded Thompson as "little better than a spy in camp." Franchère says that it was the general opinion at the time that he was there solely to anticipate Astor in establishing a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia, but had been prevented by untoward circumstances from doing it.

The action of McDougal and McKenzie in the winter of 1812-13, immediately after McKenzie had returned from the interior with news of the war, was wholly without excuse or justification. The resolution of these two partners to abandon the establishment and quit the country was certainly a most extraordinary proceeding. McDougal, by virtue of Astor's proxy, possibly had the technical right to take such action, but it was never intended by Mr. Astor, and was contrary to the spirit of the Articles of Association. The Association could be dissolved within five years if found *unprofitable*; but there was as yet no evidence that it would be unprofitable, and subsequent events have proved that it would have been quite the reverse. McDougal's action was

clearly *ultra vires*, and can only be explained on the ground of cowardice or disloyalty to the enterprise.

When McTavish came down to wait for the *Isaac Todd*, as he said, in the spring of 1813, McDougal permitted him to hang around Astoria for over three months, when it was within his power to have driven him out of the country, even without a resort to force.

Finally at the time of signing the manifesto stating the reason for abandoning the establishment, and during the subsequent period of negotiations for the purchase of Astoria, McDougal's treatment of his competitors was such as to cause general comment and to excite the shame and indignation of the Americans who were present. Add to this that he entered the service of the Northwest Company soon after the transfer, still acting as agent and holding the papers of the Pacific Fur Company, and permitting their contents to be known to the Northwest people, and the burden of proof is very heavy against him that he acted, in the words of Irving, "if not a perfidious, certainly a craven part."

Franchère, who gave the first account of these proceedings to the world, who wrote in Montreal and in French, and therefore not at all to catch the eye of the American public; and, moreover, who bears a reputation untarnished by any suspicions of disloyalty to Mr. Astor, takes positive ground against McDougal. "Those at the head of affairs," he wrote, "had their own fortunes to seek, and thought it more for their interest, doubtless, to act as they did; but that will not clear them in the eyes of the world, and the charge of treason to Mr. Astor's interests will always be attached to their characters." And again, "McDougal, as a reward for betraying the trust reposed in him by Mr. Astor, was made a partner in the Northwest Fur Company."

In all these matters may be seen the fruition of that course which McDougal initiated while still in New York by calling on the British minister there and divulging to him the plans of Mr. Astor. Even while yet in the presence of the patron of the great enterprise he was secretly taking steps, whether

intentionally or not, which could but be inimical to his best interest. Information has recently come to light in the journal of Alexander Henry which confirms the *prima facie* evidence of disloyalty to Astor, involved in McDougal's acceptance of a connection with the Northwest Company. McDougal was no favorite with that company, and the relations of the other partners to him, as shown in Alexander Henry's journal, were so strained that they negotiated only by letter. As with all traitors, those whom he had served by his treachery distrusted him. They clearly had no use for him; but nevertheless on the 23rd of December they made formal propositions to him which were accepted on the 25th, giving him a share in the company. It is hardly probable that they would have done this for one whom they so thoroughly disliked except in fulfillment of a promise made upon condition of his facilitating the sale of Astoria.

Of the other partners, and of the clerks, except possibly Ross and Cox, there is no doubt of their loyalty to the undertaking, nor of their readiness to stand by it under all difficulties. McDougal principally, and with him McKenzie, are the men responsible for the downfall of Astoria. Concerning this downfall itself it was as unnecessary as any human proceeding ever was. The facts upon which the necessity of abandonment was alleged in the manifesto of July 13, 1813, stand to this day unproved. In the fruits of the previous winter's trade, the first essay on the Columbia, which had all arrived at Astoria before the middle of June, was a conclusive refutation of the allegation of unprofitableness, and it was only on the ground of unprofitableness that the enterprise could be abandoned. Mr. Hunt had not yet returned as agreed, it is true, and the resident partners knew nothing of the brilliant outlook in that direction; but it was their duty to await.

The only other justification of their action would have been that they could not maintain themselves either from the danger of starvation or of capture by the British. Neither of these dangers was imminent if common sense

precautions were taken. The Astorians were never seriously reduced in supplies, and had now learned the country so well that they could easily have made themselves self-supporting. They had, moreover, reason to expect an early addition to their stores from the annual ship or from Mr. Hunt.

As to capture by a British war vessel, it was a matter always within their power to save everything except the buildings, which could be replaced at slight expense. A small establishment could have been built farther back, where a ship's force could not have followed, and here the valuable property could have been stored pending developments. The main house at Astoria could have been kept open in the meanwhile and if a man-of-war had actually come in sight, it could have been hastily abandoned. The war vessel would then have found only the empty buildings and at most could only have destroyed these. The crew would not have dared to undertake an expedition into the interior among natives warmly attached to the Astorians, and would have been compelled to withdraw without having accomplished anything. That this was the opinion of those at the time who remained loyal to the enterprise may be seen from the following remarks of Franchère: "From the account given in this chapter the reader will see with what facility the establishment of the Pacific Fur Company could have escaped capture by a British force. It was only necessary to get rid of the land party of the Northwest Company, who were completely in our power, then remove our effects up the river upon some small stream and await the result. The sloop-of-war arrived, it is true; but, as in the case I have supposed, she would have found nothing, she would have left after setting fire to our deserted houses. None of their boats would have dared follow us, even if the Indians had betrayed to them our lurking place." If there were any doubt on this point it is dispelled by the fact that this very course was in contemplation by the Northwest Company after the transfer, when, on one occasion, it was

doubtful whether an approaching sail were friend or foe. It is true that Alexander Henry, in his journal, speaking of his forlorn state after the Northwest Brigade had departed in April, 1814, and had left him in charge at Fort George, says that in the event of the arrival of an American vessel, retreat was impossible to him. But he had no force with him adequate to the task, and the Indians around him were hostile. His remarks refer only to the weakened condition of the fort at that time.

In short, at no time during the career of Astoria was there danger of her capture either by the British war vessels or by the Northwesters. The Astorians were always stronger and better supplied than their rivals. It was in their power to communicate with St. Louis by a route shorter and less dangerous than that of the Northwest Company to Fort William. It was already known to them that Crooks and Robert Stuart had made their way back in perfect safety over all that part of the journey which had given Hunt so much trouble. Henry's journals make known to us now, if it were not patent at the time, how precarious the situation of the Northwest Company really was, and how great was the danger that the course of events, in his own words, "would end in the failure of our business here." All that Astoria ever needed to carry her through the storm was a leader determined not to yield so long as there was a chance to hold out.

Concerning the unfortunate events at sea, such as the loss of the *Tonquin* and the *Lark*, and the conduct of Captain Sowles, bad as they were, they were not by any means irreparable blows to Astoria, for Mr. Astor had covenanted to bear all losses himself for the first five years. The most harmful feature of the maritime business was Mr. Hunt's enforced absence until affairs at the Columbia had gotten beyond recall.

A large share of the responsibility for the loss of Astoria must fall upon the government of the United States. It had warmly approved of Mr. Astor's plans, and although it

could grant him no direct assistance in time of peace, it could and ought to have lent him the small aid necessary to protect his establishment from a public enemy. It could not have been insensible to the importance of the infant colony at the mouth of the Columbia. But when the hour of danger came it lent not the slightest aid. To be sure it had its hands full at the time, but the small assistance which was required and which Mr. Astor besought the government to send, would have been a trivial burden. It would at least have been possible to have sent a company of soldiers along the track of Crooks and Stuart, and they would have held the Columbia against any attack to be feared in that quarter.

But alas! there was not a could-have-been in the whole transaction that did not turn out adversely, and wherever the element of chance entered in it ran uniformly one way. The great purpose of the enterprise, the skill with which it was planned, the far-reaching relation which it bore to the future of the United States, and the loss of life and property in the attempt to carry it out, were worthy of a better fate.²

In all this affair it is a satisfaction to exonerate the Northwest Company from any dishonorable conduct. They had a purpose to accomplish—that of driving the Americans off the Columbia. They executed this purpose with their characteristic energy and skill. They did not scruple to apply the code of the fur trade in all its severity against their rivals, but they were within their rights. They can not justly be charged with doing any more than they were entitled to do in the circumstances; but that only makes our shame the greater that there was no one on the other side possessed of the same dogged determination to maintain their rights.

²The total number of persons lost in the company's service was not less than sixty-five. For a muster of the Astorians, and biographical sketches of the leading characters, see Appendix C.

CHAPTER XIV.

ASTORIA.

ITS AUTHOR AND THE "SOURCES OF HIS INSPIRATION."

Astoria fortunate in her historian — Irving's accuracy impugned — Irving's interest in the fur trade — Alleged subservience to Mr. Astor — Irving charged with plagiarism — Irving's *Captain Bonneville* — Franchère's criticism of *Astoria* — Bancroft's treatment of Irving.

ASTORIA was as happy in finding an historian as she was unfortunate in working out her history. Irving's treatment of this subject has become classic. It has served a two-fold purpose — that of fixing in imperishable characters the history of a great enterprise, and that of preserving to posterity the most real and graphic picture now in existence of a phase of life which has entirely passed away. It is not the purpose here to offer anything in the way of criticism of this great work, but simply to notice one or two popular but erroneous notions concerning it.

The fashion among later writers upon western history has been to rate *Astoria* as a work whose classic standing in literature is due to the brilliancy of its author's style. If not directly, still constantly by innuendo, Mr. Irving's fidelity as an historian is impugned, and he is charged with having embellished his work at the expense of its accuracy. He has been accused by one writer of permitting his friendship for Mr. Astor to bias his judgment of men and events. Finally he has been charged, if not with plagiarism direct, at least with lavish use of the writings of others without due acknowledgment. It is these three matters that will here be given brief consideration.

Great in his calling is the architect or engineer who can

design a work like the Brooklyn Bridge, in which every part is so related to every other that there is nothing useless or superfluous in its construction and that the highest result of which the material is capable is realized. But far greater is he who can do not only this, but can add the touches of artistic genius by covering up the cold and severe outlines with the adornments of painting and sculpture, until the result, like St. Peter's of Rome, is a living picture of beauty. The work has lost nothing of its architectural form and proportions, and beneath the superficial beauty are still the same perfect adaptations of the parts to their various uses; but the whole effect is many fold more important, because it appeals to the hearts as well as to the judgments of men. And yet it is a prevalent notion that these two important qualities rarely coexist, and that excellence in either is ordinarily obtained at the expense of the other.

In making a somewhat exhaustive study of the authorities relating to the Astorian enterprise it was expected at the outset to find this popular idea of Irving's *Astoria* the correct one, and that when it came to removing the lustre of art there would be found a rather shaky framework in which would be many a defective member. The result has been exactly the reverse, and it has been a matter of growing astonishment throughout these studies to find with what detail the illustrious author had worked out his theme, and with what judicial fairness he had passed judgment upon actors and events. Not in the allurements of style alone, but in the essential respects of accuracy and comprehensive treatment, Irving's work stands immeasurably above all others upon the subject.

In that always troublesome matter of dates, for example, Irving has fewer errors than any other of the Astorian authors. Most of those in *Astoria* are evidently slips, and are self-corrective from the context.¹

¹To the casual reader Irving may seem to skip over his chronology rather carelessly, by his "next mornings," "following days," etc. But whoever will take pains to fit in the proper dates will find that the

A matter in which we have taken great interest is the recovery of the routes of the overland Astorians. At the time of these journeys there was almost no geographical knowledge of the country traversed between the Missouri and the Columbia — not even names in most instances to describe natural features by. Even when Irving wrote there were only the crudest maps and very little in the way of geographical information yet collected. It would seem, in this situation, that any attempt to work out routes from the meagre data derived from journals of the expedition must be in a large degree a failure, and from no fault of the author. Yet in spite of all these difficulties it is possible to identify most of the localities very closely, and many of them exactly, from Irving's description. Pen pictures which would probably pass for the effusions of a versatile pen are found to be true to the localities even at the present day. There are indeed some gaps and omissions, but these are nothing in comparison with the remarkable feat of preserving so well the line of march in which not a single scientific observation as to course or direction was taken, and in a country of which no map had ever been made.

No mistake could be greater than to suppose that Irving took up this subject simply as one affording him a good theme for his ever-ready pen, or that he neglected in any degree the weighty responsibility of the historian. The fur trade had commanded his attention from early life. He had visited Montreal and the nearer establishments of the Northwest Company, as well as our own prairies. All his life he had been thrown in contact with those who had spent much of their time in the wilderness. The doings of those engaged in the fur trade "have always been themes

author has not lost his chronology by these omissions, but has carried it along with fidelity. For example take the following from the narrative of the overland journey of the Astorians east: "On the 11th . . . the next day . . . At daybreak . . . Before daylight . . . the next morning . . . the following day . . . the next day, October 17th" etc.

of charmed interest to me," he once wrote, "and I have felt anxious to get at the details of their adventurous expeditions." And again: "It is one object of our task, however, to present scenes of the rough life of the wilderness, and we are tempted to fix these few memorials of a transient state of things fast passing into oblivion." Such was the purpose — to "fix" the "details" of events — and this motive finds expression in the remarkable accuracy which runs through the entire work.

As to the charge of undue subservience to Mr. Astor's views, it is difficult to see upon what it is based unless it be the fact that these gentlemen were warm friends. No evidence of it can be found in the book itself, which, though full of admiration for Mr. Astor's enterprise, is no more so than the subject deserves. Irving's treatment of the leading members of the company is eminently fair, and errs, if at all, on the side of generous indulgence. How could he treat more considerately than he has the action of Mr. Hunt or the conduct of Captain Thorn? McDougal might indeed wince under the lash of Irving's pen, but he could scarcely complain that the punishment was greater than the crime.

An oft repeated charge against Irving is that he made use of other authorities without due acknowledgment — and of *Franchère's Narrative* in particular. This is always a serious charge, and particularly reprehensible in an eminent author who filches from the works of obscure writers. Let us see what are the facts. At the time of the publication of *Astoria*, there were four published works which treated of portions of the enterprise. These were the works of Brackenridge and Bradbury, which related only the journey from St. Louis to the Aricara villages; and those of Franchère and Cox, which treated of the general history of the enterprise. What reference does Irving make to these works, and what is his own statement concerning the "sources of his inspiration"? He says: "All the papers relative to the enterprise were accordingly submitted to my inspection.

Among them were journals and letters narrating expeditions by land and sea, and journeys to and fro across the Rocky mountains by routes before untraveled, together with documents illustrative of savage and colonial life on the borders of the Pacific. With such materials in hand I undertook the work." Again he refers to the journals as the authorities "on which I chiefly depended." He explicitly states, however, that these were not all; that he derived information from other sources, and he tells us what those sources were. He adds: "I have, therefore, availed myself occasionally of collateral lights supplied by the published journals of other travelers who had visited the scenes described: such as Messrs. Lewis and Clark, Bradbury, Brackenridge, Long, Franchère, and Ross Cox, and make a general acknowledgment of aid received from these quarters." Not only does he thus discharge with the strictest fidelity his obligation to these authorities, but throughout the text, when he makes direct citation, he states the fact in a foot note.

As a matter of fact Irving follows none of his authorities closely, never to the extent of adopting their language. It is indeed difficult to trace his indebtedness, if there was any, and this fact alone negatives any possibility of extensive borrowing. If he did borrow, he so completely worked the matter over in his own incomparable style, that it was to all intents and purposes new matter.

The estimate that we have here given of *Astoria* applies as well to *Captain Bonneville*, a work equally remarkable for its accuracy of detail and its comprehensive treatment of a wide range of subjects. These two works are the classics of the American fur trade, unapproached and unapproachable in their particular field. They are the full fruition of Mr. Irving's desire to "fix these few memorials of a transient state of things fast passing into oblivion."²

² Although a few writers have seen fit to refer disparagingly to *Astoria* as an historical authority, there are only two who need

be considered here — Franchère, whose *Narrative* is the earliest history of Astoria, and Bancroft whose treatment is the latest.

Gabriel Franchère, who is the most reliable authority on the history of Astoria except Irving, took occasion in the English edition of his work, to criticise *Astoria* somewhat severely; but nowhere does he complain that Irving borrowed from him without credit. The burden of his complaint is that Irving gave publicity to the choleric opinions of Captain Thorn touching the young Canadians who sailed in the *Touquin*. It was indeed too rich a feast to be rejected by the genial author, and the world will always thank him for having made the most of it. Franchère, who was one of the "engravers of tombstones" and writers of journals who so moved the contempt of Captain Thorn, seems to have taken Irving seriously as endorsing the Captain's opinions, whereas he only reports them. This sensitiveness at the humorist's treatment of the young clerks is the only thing of consequence that Franchère has to urge against Irving — a complaint with so little foundation that his editor felt called upon to present a note of apology.

Hubert Howe Bancroft has endeavored to appropriate to himself the historical field of the trans-Mississippi country, and his efforts in this direction have borne fruit in thirty-eight massive volumes. He was compelled to rely mainly on co-laborers whose heterogeneous productions have been consolidated under his own direction and all placed in the first person indicative of personal responsibility. The work is unquestionably a great one in the breadth of subject covered and in the extensive list of authorities quoted, and it will always be a valuable reference work to the student. It is not a work of historical accuracy in its details. Such accuracy was not to be expected; for it would have been beyond the compass of human genius to have covered so vast a field in so short a time and have covered it well. It is not to be wondered at that it abounds in errors — wrong dates, confusion of persons, events and places, erroneous reliance upon authorities, and the like — which make it unsafe as a guide for him who would proceed carefully. These defects are inseparable from the immensity of the task and are not to have weight against the great value of the work as a whole.

No such indulgence, however, can be extended to Mr. Bancroft's discussion of certain historic questions, for pressure of work can not explain his implacable prejudices and his itching desire to put forth theories which shall subvert popular ideals or overthrow accepted conclusions. Particularly, whenever it is a question of an American view as against a Spanish, British, or Indian view, Mr. Bancroft, if the circumstances will possibly admit it, ranges himself against his own countrymen.

In no instance is this peculiar trait more flagrantly in evidence

than in his treatment of Astoria, its founder and its historian. His persistent bias of judgment and his bitter prejudice, which place him in an attitude of constant hostility toward Astor and Irving, and lead him repeatedly into sheer falsifications and downright slander, are wholly without rational explanation. It will be alike idle and wearisome to examine in detail the several pages of close print in which Mr. Bancroft exploits his hatred of these two historic characters; but a few examples illustrate the tenor of the whole.

Referring to the articles of agreement of the Pacific Fur Company Mr. Bancroft, in his efforts to clear McDougal, says: "In their agreement with Astor they [the partners] reserved the right to close the business should their interests seem so to dictate. Whatever loss might arise from the enterprise fell on each in proportion to their share." This is not so. The association was not to be dissolved until it should prove unprofitable, and the loss for the first five years was not to be borne by the partners in proportion to their share, but by Mr. Astor alone.

"Had this scheme," says Mr. Bancroft, "been based on self-sacrifice, on pecuniary loss for the public good, or the promulgation of some great principle, the current of unqualified sycophancy, sentimentality, and maudlin praise which runs through *Astoria* might be more bearable." Since when has Mr. Bancroft known of a commercial enterprise being organized on the basis of "pecuniary loss for the public good"? Commercial undertakings are not conducted in that way. It is no criticism of Mr. Astor's projects to say that their sole purpose and aim were money-making. All great projects of discovery and colonization have been founded in commerce. It has been the genius of commerce, rather than that of arms, that has carried the flag of England around the world. The first motive in the foreign policy of all governments is the protection and fostering of the commercial enterprises of their subjects wherever they may be. It may, however, be truly said of the Astorian enterprise that it *did* involve the "promulgation of a great principle"—the cause of American empire on the Pacific coast—and it did involve enormous pecuniary loss in an enterprise that was fraught with the highest possibility for the public good. In respect to the vicious attack upon Irving contained in this paragraph, the candid reader will not find in *Astoria* a single sentence that will lend even the color of justification to it.

Mr. Bancroft says of Irving and Franchère: "There are whole pages in *Astoria* abstracted almost literally from Franchère. Pretending to draw all his information from private sources, the author makes no allusion to the source to which he is most indebted, not even mentioning Franchère's name once in his whole work." It is quite evident that Mr. Bancroft had never read carefully either Irving or Franchère or he would have avoided the pitiful blunders contained in this para-

graph. The reader is referred to Irving's own statement of his authorities just given, and to his acknowledgment of aid from Franchère, Cox and others.

Again Bancroft says: "In telling this story [of Reed's massacre] Irving takes whole sentences from Ross and Cox without a sign of an acknowledgment; these works, however, were little read in America in Irving's day." The work of Ross was not published until *thirteen years after Astoria!* Irving does not take a sentence verbatim from Cox and moreover acknowledges his debt to that author for such information as was derived from him. His reference to Cox's work was a better introduction to the American reading public than the young author could have secured in any other way, and Mr. Bancroft's slur that Irving attempted to conceal his reliance upon Cox because of that author's obscurity is excusable only on the ground of ignorance.

Finally as a climax to his exhibition of spleen Mr. Bancroft says: "Up to this time the imputation that he [Irving] had received money from Mr. Astor for writing *Astoria* I believed to be utterly false and unworthy of consideration. But . . . I am otherwise unable to account for this unusual warp of judgment." Mr. Bancroft should produce his facts. To Irving living he would hardly make this accusation without proof in hand. It is not the part of courage at this late day, to placard the infamous slander upon the tombstone of one of America's most gifted and beloved authors. It is needless to say that the whole idea is a climax of absurdity. The work itself refutes the charge. Moreover, was Irving so simple as to suppose that he would escape detection at the bar of history if he departed knowingly from the facts? In the fulness of his reputation is it likely that he would tarnish his great name for any "money" that Mr. Astor might give him? Mr. Bancroft in this affair stands in no higher character than that of libeler and slanderer and his performance is a disgrace to American history.

A searching criticism of Mr. Bancroft's treatment of the Astorian enterprise was published in 1885 in the March number of the *Magazine of American History*. It is from the pen of Peter Koch of Bozeman, Montana.

I regret to note in some of the late Doctor Coues' recent works an inclination to sanction these popular errors concerning Irving's works on the fur trade; and I deem it only just to say, as an inference from my correspondence with him, that these impressions were rather the result of reading hostile authors like Bancroft than from mature investigation. As his attention was called through specific examples to the general accuracy and originality of these works, he materially modified his earlier opinion of them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUR COMPANY.

ASHLEY AND HIS MEN.

William H. Ashley — Andrew Henry — Jedediah S. Smith — The Sublettes — James Bridger — Thomas Fitzpatrick — Henry Fraeb — Robert Campbell — David Jackson — Etienne Provost and others.

THE founder of that fur-trading association which at one time in its career bore the name at the head of this chapter, was William H. Ashley, of St. Louis, one of the most noted and successful of the traders. With him was associated Andrew Henry, another distinguished character in the early fur trade; while in his employ was a remarkable group of young men whose names in later years became well known throughout the West. Among them were Jedediah S. Smith, David E. Jackson, William L. Sublette and his brother Milton, Robert Campbell, James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Samuel Tulloch, James P. Beckwourth, Etienne Provost, and many others.

ASHLEY.

William Henry Ashley was born in Powhatan county, Virginia, in 1778. He came to St. Louis in 1802, and remained there until his death. There is little known about his early career in St. Louis, and it is necessary to draw inferences from the occasional hints that are found in the newspapers and correspondence of the times. He was engaged at one time in the real estate business, and for some years prior to 1820 was interested in the manufacture of gunpowder at Mine Shibboleth, having doubtless taken up the business as a consequence of the War of 1812. He was also engaged in mining, then one of the most flourishing industries in Missouri, and probably in this way became ac-

quainted with his future able partner in the fur trade, Andrew Henry "of the mines." In 1814 he was one of a committee of gentlemen to solicit subscriptions for a proposed bank in St. Louis. He took an active part in developing the militia of the state, and gradually advanced through the various grades of authority. He is mentioned as Captain in 1813, Colonel in 1819, and General in 1822, being then highest in command of the state troops. In politics, likewise, he began at an early day to take a hand, and in 1820 was elected the first Lieutenant-Governor of the newly admitted state of Missouri.

From these scattering glimpses of Ashley's early life it may be concluded that he was a representative American business man of the frontier type, when fixed callings were the exception and men turned their hands to whatever offered them the best prospect of success. The twenty years' apprenticeship served in the school of frontier enterprise had admirably equipped him to make the most of the opportunity of his life which now opened up before him, absorbing his time for the next six years and leaving him at the end an independently wealthy man.

The rise of the Rocky Mountain fur trade will be sketched in the ensuing chapter. Ashley entered this trade in 1822 in partnership with Andrew Henry. His early essays were not particularly encouraging. In his first expedition he lost a keelboat and cargo worth ten thousand dollars, and in 1823 suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Aricaras, and minor outrages to his force under Henry at the mouth of the Yellowstone. In the summer of 1824 he was defeated as candidate for Governor of Missouri. In spite of these reverses, which might well have discouraged him, he set out for the mountains in the fall of 1824 with a new expedition, having sent only a little way ahead of him another under Henry. Luck now turned in his direction. Year after year his parties came down from the mountains with the most astonishing returns, and by 1828 his fortune was assured.

Of Ashley's personal visits to the upper country there were only four. He went as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone in 1822 and to the Aricara villages in 1823. In 1824 he went to the Green river valley and in the following spring to Great Salt Lake. He made another journey to the mountains in 1826, when he sold out to Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. He started on a fifth trip in 1827 but was prevented by ill health from completing it.

Ashley had at this time formed a comprehensive view of the way in which the fur trade ought to be conducted. He had laid his plans to attempt the Blackfoot country again, in spite of the disastrous failures of the Missouri Fur Company, and he had even fixed upon the mouth of the Marias river as the proper site of his proposed establishment. But his activities were now turned into new fields and he never carried out these extensive designs. His financial fortune being won, the old thirst for political honors returned. It was an opportune moment to present himself to the people as a candidate for their suffrages. He had won a high place in public esteem by his business successes and his public spirit, while his exploits in the mountains had given an air of romance to his career which counts for so much in the quest for popular favor. Keelboats and steamboats were named for him, and "Ashley beaver" came to have a definite place in the trade as the name of an extra fine brand of that fur. His opinions on all matters pertaining to the business of the fur trade were of the highest authority. In short, General Ashley at this time was the most influential man in Missouri, next to Senator Benton.¹

Ashley was elected to Congress in 1831 to fill the unexpired term of Spencer Pettis, who was killed in a duel with Thomas Biddle on August 27th of that year. He was twice re-elected, and continued in office until March 4, 1837. His services were of great value to the people of his state. His

¹ It is possible that there were other and more substantial inducements that led Gen. Ashley to give up his expeditions to the mountains. See foot note to letter of Thomas Forsythe, Appendix E.

practical knowledge of the western country made his opinions sought on all questions relating to the Indian trade. He supported the bill for the permanent exclusion of liquor from the Indian country, but more because it was an administration measure than from any belief in its practical workings. He was instrumental in securing the first government aid for improving the channel of the Mississippi in the vicinity of St. Louis. He was popular in public life and was greatly assisted by his wife, better known in after years as the wife of John J. Crittenden, and one of the most accomplished women of her time.

Ashley was in poor health when he left Congress and never fully recovered. He returned to his beautiful home in St. Louis where he remained until shortly before his death. Early in 1838, being much broken down, he went with his wife to reside for a time with Dr. James W. Moss, Mrs. Ashley's father, at his home near the confluence of the La Mine and Missouri rivers, hoping that the change would be beneficial. In this they were disappointed; the General's health rapidly failed, and he died March 26, 1838. In accordance with his request, made shortly before his death, he was buried on an Indian mound in a beautiful situation on a bluff overlooking the Missouri a mile above the mouth of the La Mine river.² A few years after Ashley's death a wooden fence was built around the grave, but this has now decayed, and as no monument was erected, the grave is in a state of neglect with nothing whatever to mark it — a fate that has befallen many another prominent man.³

Ashley's death was a great loss to his state and to the political party to which he belonged. One of the most touching eulogies ever devoted by the press to the memory of a public man was that which appeared in the *Missouri Republican* of April 3, 1838. On the 5th of the same month

²The foregoing facts relating to the sickness and death of General Ashley I have from a biographical sketch by Wm. F. Switzler, published in the *Columbia (Missouri) Herald* Sept. 22, 1899.

³"A lind tree to the foot and a cedar to the head" of his grave is the present condition as described by the farmer who now owns the land.

a meeting was held of the citizens of St. Louis county to take action on his death, while on every hand testimonials of esteem and expressions of sorrow were heard.

Ashley is said to have been four times married, but of his earlier marriages no record survives. He was married to Miss Elizabeth Christy October 26, 1825, immediately after his return from his first success in the mountains. She lived only five years and in 1833 he married a widow, Mrs. Wilcox, whose rare accomplishments we have elsewhere referred to. Ashley left no children.

HENRY.

Andrew Henry, one of the original incorporators of the Missouri Fur Company, and later the partner of Gen. W. H. Ashley, was born between 1773 and 1778, in Fayette county, Pa. It is not known when he migrated West, but probably before the cession of Louisiana. He joined the Missouri Fur Company in 1809 and bore the brunt of the terrible struggle with the Blackfeet in the following year at the Three Forks of the Missouri. Driven from this position, he crossed the Divide and built a post on that tributary of Snake river, which still bears his name. He was thus the first American trader to carry his business to the Pacific side of the mountains. Unable to maintain himself there he returned to the settlements in the following year. Nothing is known of his doings for the next ten years, but he presumably went into the business of mining, for there is one reference to him about 1815 as "Andrew Henry of the mines."

In 1822 he associated himself with Ashley, and his doings during the next two years will presently be narrated. It is not known when he finally left the Indian country, nor to what business he devoted himself in his later years. He was at one time well off, but lost his money by becoming surety for defaulting debtors. Urged to put his property in his wife's name to avoid its loss, he indignantly repelled the suggestion, preferring to live a poor man rather than a dishonest one.

Henry died at his residence in Harmony township, Washington county, Missouri, January 10, 1832. A St. Louis paper, announcing the event, referred to him as "a man much respected for his honesty, intelligence, and enterprise. . . . One of those enterprising traders who first explored the wild and inhospitable regions of the Rocky mountains."

Henry married, late in life, a beautiful woman of French birth much younger than himself, whom he had once carried as a child in his arms, and then playfully predicted that she would yet be his wife. He left a son, Patrick, who died July 15, 1898, leaving a daughter, Miss Mary Henry, who still resides in the vicinity of her grandfather's home.

Henry is described as tall and slender, yet of commanding presence, with dark hair and light eyes inclined to blue. He was fond of reading and played the violin well. He was not a member of any church, but was a believer in the Christian religion. He was evidently a man of acts rather than words, and no letter or recorded expression of his has come down to us. We know only his signature, which may be seen with that of others at the foot of the articles of incorporation of the Missouri Fur Company.

SMITH.

Jedediah S. Smith was one of the most remarkable men that ever engaged in the American Fur Trade. He was like that distinguished character of later years, Stonewall Jackson, in combining with the most ardent belief in, and practice of, the Christian religion, an undaunted courage, fierce and impetuous nature, and untiring energy. His deeds are unfortunately much veiled in obscurity, but enough has survived to show that he was a true knight errant, a lover of that kind of adventure which the unexplored West afforded in such ample degree.

Smith was born in the state of New York, of respectable parentage, was well educated, and at about eighteen years of age went to St. Louis, where he entered the service of Ashley and Henry in 1823. It is a singular coincidence that

Smith, Jackson, and Sublette were all in this expedition. They greatly distinguished themselves in the battle with the Aricaras, June 2, 1823. After Ashley's retreat, and while he was waiting for the military to come to his relief, it became important to communicate with Henry on the Yellowstone. It was an extremely hazardous errand, and Ashley called for volunteers. To the astonishment of every one, young Smith, a mere youth, stepped forward and offered to go. Ashley was greatly impressed with the young man's intrepidity. He accepted the offer, but prevailed upon an experienced Canadian Frenchman to go with him. The mission was successfully performed, although not without great peril.

The rest of Smith's career in the fur trade will be narrated in another part of this work. It was full of the most perilous adventures, and carried him over all the West, from the British boundary to the Mexican provinces, and from the Mississippi to the Pacific. He was twice in California, and always referred to that country as the most beautiful on the globe. On several occasions his escape from the Indians, from grizzly bears, and from starvation, bordered on the miraculous. In 1826 he became senior member of the firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, which sold out to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1830. The following year the three partners embarked in the Santa Fe trade; but during the first expedition Smith lost his life on the Cimarron.⁴

"Smith was a bold, outspoken, professing, and consistent Christian, the first and only one known among the early Rocky mountain trappers and hunters. No one who knew him well doubted the sincerity of his piety. He had become a communicant of the Methodist church before leaving his home in New York, and . . . in St. Louis he never failed to occupy a place in the church of his choice, while he gave generously to all objects connected with the religion which he professed and loved. . . . Besides being an adventurer and a hero, a trader and a Christian, he was

⁴ See Chapter XXXI., this Part.

himself inclined to literary pursuits, and had prepared a geography and atlas of the Rocky mountain region, extending perhaps to the Pacific, but his death occurred before its publication."⁵

SUBLETTE.

This is a name highly distinguished in the fur trade. There were four brothers⁶ who engaged in the trade — Andrew, Solomon P., Milton G., and William L.— but only the last two bore a prominent part in it.

Milton G. Sublette was a great deal in the mountains with his elder brother, and was one of the firm of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and later of the firm of Fitzpatrick, Sublette and Bridger. He was an able trader, although less distinguished than William L. His death was caused by a disease in his leg, which compelled him to relinquish his expedition of 1834 to the mountains. His leg was twice amputated, but to no purpose, and he died at Fort Laramie December 19, 1836.

William L. Sublette was one of the most distinguished and successful of the fur traders, and renowned as a bold and hardy mountaineer. He was born in 1799, and came to St. Charles in 1818, where he commenced life by putting up the first billiard table in that town. He came from Kentucky stock, and it was claimed by the family that his grandfather was the slayer of Tecumseh, at the battle of the Thames. His ancestors on both sides were celebrated in the frontier history of the West. Sublette was one of the company of "enterprising young men" whom Ashley advertised for and secured for his early mountain expeditions under Henry. With him were Jedediah S. Smith and David E. Jackson, who were long and intimately associated with him in his later business career. He was with Ashley at the Aricara fight, June 2, 1823, and held the rank of Sergeant-

⁵ William Waldo in MS. No. 135, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

⁶ A P. W. Sublette was killed by the Blackfeet in 1828 in the Rocky mountains.

Major in the attack upon the villages August 9-11, under Leavenworth.

His name does not occur often in the next three years, but it is certain that he was actively engaged in the mountain trade under Ashley, for in 1826, he, with Smith and Jackson, bought out Ashley and succeeded to his business under the firm name of Smith, Jackson and Sublette.

This partnership being dissolved by the death of Smith in 1831, Sublette remained foot loose in business connections until the fall of 1832. In the summer of that year he went to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company rendezvous in Pierre's Hole, where he participated in the celebrated battle with the Blackfeet July 18th, in which he received a severe wound.

On the 20th of December, 1832, Sublette formed a partnership with his fast friend, Robert Campbell, who had long been a companion on his mountain expeditions. This firm continued for ten years and constituted the only serious opposition which the American Fur Company had to encounter during this time. Their two principal trading posts were on the Platte at the mouth of the Laramie, and on the Missouri, near Fort Union. The firm was dissolved by mutual agreement January 12, 1842, Campbell apparently taking the business, although there is evidence that the firm name was longer continued.

Sublette did not long survive the close of his affairs in the Indian country. While on his way to Washington in 1845 he died at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on the 23rd of July.

From a passport now in the possession of Mr. M. L. Gray, of St. Louis, granted by the United States government to Sublette in 1831 to enable him to visit Santa Fe and other points in New Mexico, we have the following description of his personal appearance: "Height six feet two inches; forehead straight and open; eyes blue, light; nose Roman; mouth and chin common; hair light or sandy; complexion fair; face long and expressive; scar on left side of chin." He was at this time thirty-two years old.

While not a man of conspicuous ability Sublette was admirably adapted to the business of the mountain fur trade; was feared and respected by the Indians; and was a bold and successful leader. His partner, Campbell, and he were fast friends, and in a will of Campbell's dated July 27, 1835, Sublette was included. This recalls an incident in the life of these two men when they went into the battle of Pierre's Hole in 1832. Each made his will orally to the other as they were hastening to the conflict, but fortunately both escaped.

Sublette had some political aspirations, but they were never satisfied. A curious and interesting document in more ways than one, is among the Sublette papers in the possession of Mr. Gray. It is entitled, "Give the *Pioneer à boire!* William L. Sublette," and is written by one of Sublette's friends who signs himself a "Pioneer of the Far West — one of the hardy race which have been opening the wild country in advance of the thick settlements since the first colonization of our continent." It is a strong plea for the election of Sublette to Congress. After reviewing the situation generally in a strain which today would stamp him as a loyal believer in the Chicago Platform of 1896, the writer presents his candidate "as amongst the fittest of the prominent men of our party to be placed on the general ticket for Congress. His experience, fit age, chivalric character, his intimate acquaintance with the people, and their confidence in him, and above all his undeviating adherence to, and practice of, the pure Democratic-Republican principles through his past life, are the qualifications which endear him to the people." All this, though politics, was true, but it did not avail to send him to Congress.

In 1841 Sublette was appointed aide-de-camp to Governor Thomas Reynolds. In the spring of 1845 he wrote to Senator Benton to see if he could not secure the superintendency of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, and it was probably on this business that he was going to Washington when his last illness overtook him.

Sublette was independently rich when he died. He lived in much comfort, and always maintained a lively interest in his Far West career. At the Sublette and Campbell store there was a wigwam in which an Indian family was maintained. He had several Indians around him, who, when they died, were buried in the private burying ground of the Sublettes. On the Sublette farm were kept specimens of the wild fauna, while in the house were numerous curiosities characteristic of Indian life. He was called Fate by the Indians.

Sublette was buried in the private burying ground on the farm in the outskirts of St. Louis, and in later years his remains were removed to Bellefontaine cemetery, where they now rest. The place is marked by a granite shaft.

Sublette was married to Miss Frances Hereford, of Tusculumbia, Alabama, March 21, 1844. Gossip surrounds this incident with a little romance worthy of mention. It is said that the lady in question had formed a prior attachment to William's younger brother, Solomon P., but that William's greater fortune turned the scale in his favor. When Sublette died, soon after his marriage, he willed his property to his wife on condition that she should not change her name. Four years after her husband's death she married her first love, Solomon P.

By one of those peculiar fatalities which now and then overtake families, the Sublette family has become almost extinct.

BRIDGER.

James Bridger, who was generally considered the ablest hunter, mountaineer and guide of the West, was born in Richmond, Virginia, March 17, 1804. His father's name was William, and his mother's name was Chloe. They kept a tavern in Richmond. In 1812 they went to St. Louis, but soon moved to Six-Mile Prairie, where they passed the rest of their lives. When Bridger was thirteen years old he was apprenticed to Phil Creamer, of St. Louis, to learn the blacksmith trade. Nothing is known of him for the next five

years. In 1822 he went to the Indian country in the party under Andrew Henry, which contained so many names afterward distinguished in Western history. There is some evidence that he was the young man of the party who deserted Hugh Glass in 1823.⁷ Bridger was one of the band of explorers among whom were Etienne Provost and Andrew Henry, who discovered South Pass and opened up the trade of the Great Salt Lake and Green river valleys. He is the first white man whom we know to have seen the Great Salt Lake. He visited it in the winter of 1824-5.

It would be an endless task to trace the ubiquitous wanderings of this restless mountaineer during the next forty years of his life. There was scarcely an accessible spot in the mountains that he was not acquainted with. He had become a daring leader before 1830 and in that year was one of the partners of the newly organized firm of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. He led his expeditions in every direction, saw many a fight with the Indians, and in 1832 was wounded in the back by an arrow, which was extracted in 1835 by the missionary, Dr. Whitman. After the disbanding of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company Bridger entered the service of the American Fur Company, and he seems to have been with the company from that time on, for several years, or at least as late as 1843. There is on record a power of attorney to William L. Sublette executed by Bridger for the collection from Pratte, Chouteau and Company of \$3,317.13 for two years' services. It is dated Wind river, July 13, 1838. For several years Bridger was associated with one Vasquez, in hunting enterprises for the American Fur Company. In 1843 he founded Fort Bridger on Black's Fork of Green river, and it became one of the famous posts of the West. After 1843 Bridger led a more regular order of life, giving much of his time to his business at Fort Bridger and gradually drifting into government service. His long schooling of twenty-five years in this wild country had given him qualifications as a guide

⁷ See Part IV., Chapter VIII.

not surpassed by any other. He was in constant demand on official expeditions, and always commanded a good salary. Almost continuously for upward of twenty years he was engaged in this work, and was as much entitled to be called a veteran as were any of the officers and soldiers of the army.


But neither the business of his earlier life nor that which followed could long continue. Both related to phases of American history which were essentially evanescent. Bridger lived to see the conditions which made a career like his possible pass entirely away; and in his later years he must have felt like a man without a country, so different was his environment then from that in which he had passed his prime. His keenest enjoyment in his old age was to find some comrade of his early life with whom he might live over again those adventures which now existed only in memory.

Late in life Bridger settled on a farm near Westport, Missouri, now a part of Kansas City. Here he died July 17, 1881.

Bridger gained his chief reputation as a guide, and it would be easy to fill pages with the voluntary testimonials of his contemporaries from published narratives of the times. All references to him are in his praise, and although, like any man of prominence, he had his enemies, these were generally confined to rivals in his particular calling, who were jealous of his superiority.

FITZPATRICK.

Thomas Fitzpatrick was a prominent member of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and later was much in the service of the government during the era of exploration. Like many other men of this period his comings and goings are lost behind the scenes, and all that is known of him is from transient glimpses while he is passing across the stage before us. He went to the mountains with Ashley, and was with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company throughout its



career. After the downfall of the fur business he continued in the West, and is frequently mentioned in narratives of travel of that period. He was often employed by the government as a guide, and probably knew the Western country as well as any man except Bridger. He was known to the Indians as the Bad Hand.

FRAEB.

Henry Fraeb⁸ was a member of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company from 1830 to 1834, and was distinguished among the mountaineers for his skill and courage as a partisan. He must have followed the mountains for as many as fifteen years. He was killed on St. Vrain's fork of the Yampah river in southern Wyoming, in the latter part of August, 1841, in a battle between about sixty whites and a war party of Sioux and Cheyennes. Fraeb and four companions were killed. The battle is supposed to have been near a fort built by Fraeb in this locality, which was then or soon after destroyed.

CAMPBELL.

Robert Campbell was born in 1804 in Aughlane, County Tyrone, Ireland, and came to St. Louis in 1824. A year later he was prostrated with hemorrhage of the lungs, and upon the advice of physicians undertook a trip to the mountains in one of Ashley's parties. The result was a complete restoration of his health. He remained in the mountain trade for the next twenty years or more, but personally withdrew from conduct of operations in the field about 1835. His partnership with Sublette has been noted elsewhere.

Campbell became one of the foremost business men of St. Louis. In the course of his career he was president of the old State Bank and of the Merchants' National Bank, and the owner of the Southern Hotel. In 1851 he was a Commissioner with Father De Smet to treat with the Indians in the great conference near Fort Laramie. He was

⁸ Always spelled, and of course pronounced, by his contemporaries *Frapp*, but signed by himself as above.

appointed by President Grant on a similar commission in 1869. He died in St. Louis October 16, 1879.

These are some of the more prominent of the "enterprising young men" whom Ashley took with him to the mountains. One not considered here was David Jackson, of whose biography nothing worthy of mention has come to light except his association with Smith and Sublette. He was fortunate in bequeathing his name to one of the most beautiful situations in nature — the valley and lake at the eastern base of the Teton mountains.

It is a remarkable coincidence that Ashley should have drawn together under his banner so many choice spirits, and in this good fortune may be discerned something of the secret of his success. There were many others of note, besides those whose names are here given. There was Etienne Provost, one of the best and most reliable of the mountain men, believed to have been the discoverer of South Pass, and the same whose name now designates the city of Provo, Utah. There was old Hugh Glass — he of the duel with the grizzly bear — and there were Edward Rose, the Crow man, and James Beckwourth, the inimitable fabricator of frontier yarns. There were also Mike Fink, the famous shot and treacherous friend, and his victim, Carpenter, and Carpenter's avenger, Talbot. How many others there were we do not know, but these are enough to make Ashley's expeditions famous in the annals of the West.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUR COMPANY.

UNDER WILLIAM H. ASHLEY.

Ashley's advertisement — Plan of Gen. Ashley — Henry's expedition of 1822 — Ashley's expedition of 1823 — Treacherous character of the Aricaras — The affair at the Aricara villages — Ashley's retreat — Express sent to Henry and to Fort Atkinson — Henry joins Ashley — Henry returns to the Yellowstone and Ashley to St. Louis — Henry moves up the Yellowstone — South Pass discovered — Jedediah S. Smith visits Hudson Bay Company posts — Henry goes to St. Louis and immediately returns to the mountains — Ashley's doings in 1823-4 — Change in method of business — Ashley goes to Green river valley — Ashley descends Green river and is shipwrecked — Meeting of Ashley and Provost — Provost's party massacred by the Snakes — Ashley south of Salt Lake — Ashley and Ogden — Ashley starts for St. Louis — Meets General Atkinson at mouth of Yellowstone — Arrives in St. Louis — Marries — Returns to the mountains in 1826 — Sells out to Smith, Jackson and Sublette — Etienne Provost's defection — Effect of Ashley's success.

THE beginning of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company may be definitely traced to the following announcement, which appeared in the *Missouri Republican* of St. Louis, March 20, 1822: "To enterprising young men. The subscriber wishes to engage one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri river to its source, there to be employed for one, two, or three years. For particulars enquire of Major Andrew Henry, near the lead mines in the county of Washington, who will ascend with, and command, the party; or of the subscriber near St. Louis." [Signed.] "William H. Ashley." The first recorded license for Ashley to trade on the upper Missouri bears date of April 11, 1822, and "a license of precisely the same tenor and date was granted to Major Andrew Henry."

The response to this advertisement was prompt and satisfactory. The desired number was duly enrolled and was made up almost entirely from young men, "many of whom had relinquished the most respectable employments and circles of society for the arduous" life of the wilderness. The plan was to ascend to the Three Forks of the Missouri, a region which was believed to abound in a "wealth of furs not surpassed by the mines of Peru." The party would be absent three years, trapping on all "the streams on both sides of the mountains in that region, and would very likely penetrate to the mouth of the Columbia."

The expedition was commanded by Andrew Henry,¹ and left St. Louis about April 15, with two keelboats laden with merchandise and trapping equipments. It passed Franklin April 25. About twenty miles below old Fort Osage the party met with a heavy misfortune in the loss of a keelboat from striking a snag. It sank almost instantly, carrying down property valued at ten thousand dollars. It was with difficulty that the crew were saved. In spite of this heavy loss the expedition kept on and met with no incident of serious import until after it had passed the Mandans. On his way from the Mandan villages to the mouth of the Yellowstone in the month of August, Henry met with a serious mishap at the hands of the Assiniboine Indians. He was aboard the boat while a land party with some fifty horses were following the river bank. At a point where the river channel was for a considerable distance near the farther bank, forcing the parties away from each other, a band of Indians met the shore party, and under the guise of friendship got possession of the horses and then rode off. It was the plan of the expedition to push on to the Falls of the Missouri the present season and commence a fort there, but the loss of the horses prevented. A post² was accordingly established at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and the

¹ Ashley was also with the party and ascended as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone, returning in the fall.

² See list of posts, Appendix F.

winter was spent there. The hunters explored and trapped the streams in that section, and Henry secured a fresh supply of horses.

Early the next spring Henry set out for the Blackfoot country. The details of his expedition are extremely meager, and all that is known is that he was attacked by the Blackfeet in the neighborhood of Great Falls with the loss of four men killed, and was driven out of the country. He returned to the mouth of the Yellowstone sometime in June, 1823.

In the meantime Ashley had advertised at St. Louis for another one hundred men and had organized his disastrous expedition of 1823. He accompanied it himself, and left St. Louis with two keelboats on the 10th of March. His progress was without notable incident until his arrival before the Aricara villages on the 30th of May.

The fickle and treacherous character of these Indians was well understood.³ It could never be predicted what their attitude would be. In 1804 and 1806 they were friendly to Lewis and Clark. In 1807 they attacked and defeated Ensign Pryor and his party, who were escorting the Mandan chief home. The Missouri Fur Company and the Astorians had no serious trouble with them in 1811, but in 1816 or 1817 they attacked a party of whites and killed one man. In 1820 they robbed two trading houses of the Missouri Fur Company, located one above and one below the Great Bend of the Missouri. Pilcher, who first visited them in 1822, found them exceedingly friendly, and was quite deceived in regard to their true character. The Indians continued their deprivations, however, and even tried to waylay Pilcher himself on his descent of the river. During the month of March, 1823, they went down the river to the Missouri Fur Company establishment among the Sioux, where they robbed a party of whites, and finally, to the number of one hundred and fifteen, attacked the trading house. They were repulsed with the loss of several wound-

* See Chapter IX., Part V.

ed and two killed, including the son of a principal chief. Such was the record of this tribe down to May, 1823, when General Ashley arrived before their villages.

It was Ashley's intention to imitate Hunt's course of twelve years before, and to purchase a number of horses from the Aricaras, so that he could send a portion of his men across the country to the Yellowstone. This was the more important because an express had just arrived from Henry, urging Ashley to bring up all the horses he could secure. It was decided therefore to open up a trade with the Aricaras, who were always well provided with these animals. The conduct of these negotiations, and their lamentable outcome, will be described very nearly in General Ashley's own words.

The General was not wholly unprepared for a hostile demonstration, although these Indians had treated him with great friendship the year before. He knew the character of the tribe and had reason to expect that they would be in a revengeful mood on account of the recent loss of two of their warriors. Upon his arrival, therefore, he anchored his two keelboats well out in the stream and himself with two men went on shore. Here he met some of the principal chiefs, who professed friendship and expressed a desire to trade. Ashley then proposed that the chiefs of the two villages should meet him on the sand beach where all the details of the trade could be arranged. After a long consultation among themselves, the Indians agreed to his proposal, and the council was held at the designated place. Ashley made the chiefs some presents, at which they appeared well pleased. He then said that he had understood that they had had some trouble with a party of the Missouri Fur Company, and feared that they might be disposed to harm him. He explained to them the probable consequences of such an attempt. The Indians replied that the angry feelings which the event had stirred up were now allayed, and that they considered the whites their friends. A price for the horses was agreed upon, the trading commenced, and by the

evening of the 1st of June, Ashley had completed his preparations and had arranged to set out the next morning with both the boat and land parties. He was intending to conduct the land party himself.

Late in the afternoon of the 1st the chief of one of the villages sent an invitation to Ashley to visit him at his lodge. Ashley hesitated, but finally decided to go, lest his refusal might lead the Indians to think he distrusted them. Accordingly he went with his interpreter to call on the chief, who received him with every evidence of friendship, as did also several other chiefs who were present. Ashley was quite thrown off his guard by these well-played deceptions, and returned to his quarters on the boat confident that everything was all right.

It should be stated, although Ashley makes no mention of it, that he was warned at this time to be on his guard. His interpreter, the noted Edward Rose, cautioned him that, from signs apparent to those versed in Indian wiles, trouble of some sort was brewing. Ashley seems to have been about as suspicious of Rose as Hunt had been twelve years before, and with just as little reason. He rejected Rose's advice to moor the boats for the night against a bar on the opposite side of the river, and not only remained near the shore next to the villages, but even left his land party encamped on the beach. Among the latter were Smith, Sublette, and Jackson. This party numbered about forty men, and had with them all the horses which had been purchased.

The Aricara Indians at this time resided in two villages, the lower one containing seventy-one dirt lodges, and the upper one seventy. Both towns had been newly picketed with timber, which, according to General Ashley, was from twelve to fifteen feet high, and six inches thick. There was a ditch outside, and part of the way inside also, and the earth was banked up against the inside to a height of eighteen inches. The lower village where Ashley was encamped was on the convex bend of the river with a large

sand bar in front, forming nearly two-thirds of a circle. Between the bar and the shore on which the village stood ran the river. At the head of the bar the channel was very narrow and here the Indians had built a timber breastwork which entirely commanded the river. They had shown excellent judgment in their arrangements both for attack and defense.⁴ There were even indications that a party of Indians was concealed on the opposite bank at a point where the river channel, after passing the upper village, ran close to the east shore.

At about half past three o'clock on the morning of June 2nd, Ashley was awakened and informed that one of his men had been killed by the Aricaras, and that an immediate attack on his parties was threatened. Instant preparations were made for defense. As soon as daylight came the Indians opened fire from a line along the picketing of the town for some six hundred yards. The ground was broken and there was some timber shelter so that the Indians fought with every advantage of good cover. Their fire was heavy and mainly concentrated on the party on shore, who used their horses as a breastwork. The whites returned the fire with vigor, but the Indians were so well concealed that they suffered but little injury.

As soon as the firing commenced Ashley undertook to have the horses swum across to a submerged sand bar on the other side of the river, but before he could accomplish anything the fire had become so destructive that he abandoned the attempt. He then undertook to move his keel-boats in shore, a distance of only about ninety feet, in order to take on the men, but the boatmen were so panic-stricken that they refused to expose themselves in the least degree. Ashley then managed to get two skiffs ashore capable of holding about thirty men, but the land party were determined not to yield, and only seven men, four of whom were

⁴“I think that about three-fourths of them [the Indians] are armed with London fusils that carry a ball with great accuracy and force, and which they use with as much expertness as any men I ever saw handle arms.” Ashley.

wounded, took advantage of the opportunity. The small skiff with two men wounded, one mortally, made for the opposite shore. The large skiff, after transferring its five men to the keelboat, was sent back, but before it reached the shore one of the men who were handling it was shot down and in some way the boat got adrift. By this time nearly all the horses were killed and half the men on shore were either killed or wounded. Ashley made every possible effort to move the keelboats in shore, but to no purpose. The men on the beach, seeing the uselessness of further resistance, retreated into the river and swam to the boats. Several who tried to reach the boats after being wounded were drowned. So fiercely did the conflict rage that it was only fifteen minutes from the time the attack began until the shore party was dispersed and the remnant had reached the boats. The anchor of one of the boats was raised and the cable of the other cut, and they thus drifted down out of the reach of the villages and put ashore at the first timber, apparently on the head of Ashley Island, a short distance below.⁵

Ashley's purpose now was, after landing at the timber, to put the party in better shape for defense and then to renew his efforts to pass the village. But to his "surprise and mortification," he was "told by the men (with a few exceptions) that under no circumstances would they make a sec-

⁵ Two accounts of this battle state that the Indians finally succeeded in getting between the land party and the river, thus cutting off retreat, whereupon the survivors were compelled to cut their way out, leaping into the river and swimming to the boats. But this was not the case.

Of the whites there were killed on the spot twelve, and two of the wounded died soon after, making fourteen. There were also nine wounded, making a total of twenty-three casualties. All the horses and such of the property as was on shore were also lost. Ashley gives the names of the killed and wounded, but none of them are familiar except that of Hugh Glass who was wounded. It was thought that only a few, not more than six or eight, of the Indians were killed or wounded. The shore party fought with the utmost bravery and coolness, but it was impossible to withstand the terrible fire of the Indians, protected as they were by their cover. The voyageurs proved themselves arrant cowards.

ond attempt to pass without a large reinforcement." The utmost that they would agree to do was, that if Ashley would descend the river some twenty-five miles, fortify his camp, and take other measures for their security, they would wait there until he could receive aid from Henry or elsewhere. Ashley was compelled to accede to this proposition, but when he arrived at the designated point the men determined to go farther. Most of them were resolved to desert. Ashley called for volunteers, and thirty agreed to remain — among them only five boatmen, or voyageurs. He then transferred to one of the keelboats, the *Yellowstone*, as much of the property as he could from the other, and sent the latter down the river with the seriously wounded and such of the men as would not remain, with instructions to store the balance of the property at the first post below. Ashley sent word at once to Major O'Fallon, Indian Agent, and to the commanding officer at Fort Atkinson, notifying them of his disaster, and informing them that if they would send a government force to chastise the Indians he would wait and co-operate. In that event he advised bringing some artillery.

Immediately after the battle Ashley sent an express to Henry. It has already been related how young Jedediah S. Smith volunteered on this perilous service. He made his way through successfully, although with some narrow escapes. Fortunately Henry had returned to the mouth of the Yellowstone after his own defeat by the Blackfeet. Smith and Henry, with all but twenty men, who were left in the fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone, descended the river, and joined Ashley near the mouth of the Cheyenne about the 2nd of July. Smith was sent on to St. Louis with the proceeds of Henry's hunt. His boat passed Fort Atkinson near Council Bluffs on the 8th of July and made its way safely to St. Louis, where he saw General Atkinson, who commanded the United States troops west of the Mississippi, and then hastened back to join his employer.

In the meantime Ashley and Henry, hardly believing that

the military would undertake the campaign, or arrive before fall if they did, and not wishing to give up their plans entirely, concluded to drop down the river and if possible secure enough horses to equip the party "intended to be sent to the Columbia." They accordingly left their property with a portion of the party and dropped down stream to the mouth of the Teton river, where they stopped for a time to procure horses. They then went on to "Fort Brasseaux,"⁶ a fort not elsewhere mentioned, but which seems to have been above, but not far from, Fort Lookout. Here they learned to their great satisfaction of the near approach of the United States troops.

As the campaign which followed is more properly a part of the military history of the period than of the doings of the traders, it will be considered in another place.⁷

Immediately upon the close of the Leavenworth campaign General Ashley dispatched Henry with a party of about eighty men to carry out his plans for the season, which had been so rudely interrupted by the Aricaras. Henry moved across the country in the direction of the Yellowstone river. With him were most of the men whom Ashley had brought up, including Smith, Jackson, Sublette, Rose, Bridger, and old Hugh Glass, whose remarkable adventure with a grizzly bear⁸ on this trip was the means of preserving about all the data we now have concerning it.

The evil genius which seemed to dog Henry's footsteps in all his mountain expeditions and constantly harass him with attacks from the Indians, did not yet forsake him. On the 20th of August before he was many days out from the Missouri, he was attacked by a party of Indians, and lost two men killed and two wounded. When he reached the post at the mouth of the Yellowstone he found that twenty-two of the horses he had left there had been stolen by the Blackfeet and Assiniboines. Soon afterward he lost seven

⁶ See List of Posts, Appendix F.

⁷ Part III., Chapter III.

⁸ See Part IV., Chapter VIII.

more, when he concluded to abandon the post and move up the Yellowstone river.

Near the mouth of the Powder river Henry fell in with a party of Crows from whom he purchased forty-seven horses. He then organized a party which he probably placed under the charge of Etienne Provost, and sent it toward the southwest, while he himself went on to the mouth of the Bighorn river and erected a post.

It was during the autumn of 1823, and the following winter and spring that the rich beaver country of Green river valley, and possibly that of Great Salt Lake also, were invaded by the American traders for the first time since the ill-fated Astorians passed through them. The party dispatched by Henry to the southwest is believed to have been the first party of white men to have crossed *South Pass*. Tradition among the traders and trappers always ascribed the discovery of this pass to Provost, and there is little doubt of the fact; but of positive proof there is none. The date of discovery was probably late in the fall of 1823.

In the spring of 1824 Jedediah S. Smith set out on one of those expeditions which were so conspicuous a feature of his career, and went with a small party across the mountains to the headwaters of Snake river. He spent the summer and fall in that vicinity and meanwhile fell in with a small detached party of Hudson Bay trappers. From these he obtained in some way or other all their catch of beaver, one hundred skins, and then gave them the protection of his own party until they should find their leader, Alexander Ross. The Hudson Bay Company partisan was not much pleased with the way his men had been relieved of their fur, but he was forced to concede that the Americans were "shrewd men," and that Smith in particular was a "very intelligent person."

From this point, which was in the valley of Godin river northwest of Snake river, and on the outskirts of the great lava plain, Smith made his way north and is said to have passed the winter among the Flatheads. He visited one or

more posts of the British company and gained the first positive information concerning operations in the Columbia valley that had been received since the Astorians left the country.

Smith returned to St. Louis in the summer or autumn of 1824, and gave such information as he had gathered to General Atkinson, who considered it of so much importance that he embodied it in a report to the War Department in the November following. In this report he refers to Smith as "an intelligent young man who was employed by General Ashley beyond the Rocky mountains."

In spite of the unfortunate beginning of the expedition of 1823 it was on the whole successful. When the detached trapping parties met in the mountains in 1824⁹ they had collected a considerable quantity of beaver fur, which Henry took back to St. Louis. The results of the expedition were sufficiently favorable to justify his immediate return, and he left St. Louis on the 21st of October with a new expedition for the mountains. This departure, strange to say, is the very last word which we have of Andrew Henry in the fur trade. He evidently did not remain long in the mountains, but just when he left, or for what reason, is not known. Jedediah S. Smith took his place and remained Ashley's partner until 1826.

The doings of General Ashley from the close of the Aricara campaign to the return of Henry in the fall of 1824 are uncertain. He had a political campaign on hand, being a candidate for governor of Missouri, and that must have absorbed a large part of his time. James P. Beckwourth in his autobiography represents Ashley as actively engaged in equipping his expeditions. He sent a party in the fall of 1823 to collect horses among the Kansas and other Indians, and in the spring of 1824 set out with an expedition for the mountains. He had not gotten far from the Missouri when he was robbed of his horses on the Platte by the Pawnees,

⁹This was the first of the famous annual rendezvous in the mountains.

and was compelled to postpone his expedition until fall. In the meantime the election took place, in August, and Ashley was defeated.

By the fall of 1824 Ashley's plan of carrying on the business had undergone a complete change. Clinging to the past practice of the traders he had heretofore undertaken to conduct his business, in part, at least, from trading posts. He had already built two of these, one at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and one on that river near the mouth of the Bighorn. It was his plan to build two more on the Missouri — one at the mouth of the Marias and one at Three Forks. But like all his predecessors he failed to open trade relations with the Blackfeet, and found that the methods which worked so well on the lower river were ineffectual in the mountains. The explorations of Henry, Smith, and Provoost in the southwest near Great Salt Lake had shown that that country abounded in beaver. Finally the Missouri Fur Company was pushing its own operations with great vigor toward the head of the Missouri, and constituted a formidable competition in that quarter. These considerations led Ashley to relinquish the Missouri river valley altogether and to carry his operations to the other side of the mountains. He likewise abandoned all efforts to conduct the trade from fixed points, and relied only upon itinerant parties made up mostly of trappers. As a consequence of this new method it became necessary to appoint some place of meeting where the various parties could assemble each year with the product of their work. Hence arose the well-known *rendezvous* of the mountains, one of the most interesting features of the fur trade. The new system was, as will be seen, eminently successful for a season.

After the close of Ashley's unsuccessful political campaign he devoted his time exclusively to his mountain business. Shortly after Henry's departure, October 21, 1824, he himself set out with a party and arrived at Council Bluffs about the 1st of November. Thence he ascended the Platte river and its South Fork until he reached the mountains.

He then made his way across the country, probably somewhat south of the line of the modern Union Pacific railway, until he reached the valley of Green river. As it was already winter when he arrived there he doubtless remained in the immediate neighborhood of the valley until spring.

The doings of Ashley and his parties during the ensuing winter and spring were of the highest importance to his business, and are of much historic interest as well. In the spring of 1825 Ashley made the first attempt ever made by white men to navigate Green river. It has been said that he thought that this stream emptied into the Gulf of Mexico — an idea which was generally accepted at the time. The long easterly course of the river just south of the Wyoming boundary might have led one to suppose that its outlet was to the eastward, and this view was further strengthened by the geographical information contained in the report of Lieutenant Pike, which was at that time the only published authority that touched upon the question. It is not at all likely, however, that Ashley's attempt at navigating Green river had any other end in view than the exploration of new territory for the prosecution of his business. But whatever may have been his intention, the experiment itself was a disastrous one. He made his perilous way through Brown's Hole, to the point where the river abandons its easterly course and thence for a considerable distance to the southwest, when his boat was totally wrecked in a cascade near the mouth of what is now Ashley river. Ashley inscribed his name on a rock near by, and the inscription was seen by Major J. W. Powell, of the U. S. Geological survey, forty-four years afterwards, when that gentleman was making his exploration of the Grand Cañon of the Colorado. Near the same spot Powell found an iron bake oven, a tin plate, and other wreckage which he thought might have been Ashley's, but probably were not.¹¹

¹¹ As a striking illustration of the extent to which oblivion has obscured the events of this time, the reference of Powell to Ashley's party is particularly interesting. The inscription which he found was "on

Being now to the south of the Uintah mountains and on the west bank of Green river, Ashley probably thought it better to make his way to the west and around by Great Salt Lake then to cross the rugged mountains which he had just traversed through the dark and precipitous cañons of the river. This may possibly have been his intention from the start. At any event, after the wreck he set out to the westward, and shortly after had the good luck to fall in with Etienne Provost, who had made his way into the valley of Green river by way of Great Salt Lake. While this meeting may possibly have been accidental, it was more probably a part of General Ashley's comprehensive plan of exploring the country, and that he had instructed Provost to make a circuit and meet him on the lower course of Green river.

The united parties now made their way westward across a high rock" and read "*Ashley 18-5.*" The third figure was illegible, but as nearly as Powell could make out it was 3 or 5. Of course it was 2, but Powell evidently believed it to be 5, as the following comment will show. "Though some of his companions were drowned, Ashley and one other survived the wreck, climbed the canon wall, and found their way across the Wasatch mountains to Salt Lake City, living chiefly on berries, as they wandered through an unknown and difficult country. When they arrived at Salt Lake they were almost destitute of clothing and nearly starved. The Mormon people gave them food and clothing and employed them to work on the foundation of the Temple until they had earned sufficient to leave the country. Of their subsequent history I have no knowledge. It is possible that they returned to the scene of the disaster, as a little creek entering the stream below is known as Ashley's creek, and it is reported that he built a cabin and trapped on this river for one or two winters."

Speaking of the evanescence of fame, here is indeed an example. Little did Ashley imagine that his romantic adventures, so celebrated in their day, and himself one of the leading public men of the West, would be so far forgotten in two score years that he would be referred to in a government report of high authority as an obscure hunter on whom the Mormons (so hated in Missouri in his time) took compassion and set to work on their Temple thirty years after he was in their country! *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

In reference to Ashley's shipwreck it is worthy of note that James P. Beckwourth claims the credit of having rescued the General from drowning.

the Wasatch mountains into the Salt Lake valley. This was already familiar ground to Provost, who had been there the year before and had suffered a disaster equal to that of Ashley at the Aricara villages. On the shore of Utah Lake, where that tributary enters which now bears the name (abbreviated) of Etienne Provost, this capable frontiersman was for once completely deceived by the Indians. He had fallen in with a band of Snake Indians under an evil-minded chief, Mauvais Gauche, and was invited to smoke the calumet of peace with them. The chief said that it was contrary to his medicine to have anything of a metallic character near by while the ceremony was going on, and requested that both parties should remove their weapons to a distance. Provost yielded to the chief's importunity, for he had learned that on the whole it was better to humor the superstitious whims of the Indians. Himself and his men placed their guns to one side, and sat down in the circle to smoke. In the midst of the ceremony the Indians sprang up at a preconcerted signal and fell upon the whites with knives and tomahawks which they had kept concealed within their clothing. Most of the men were killed. Provost, who was a powerful and athletic man, extricated himself from his assailants, and with three or four others made his escape. This terrible event, which has few parallels in the history of the American Indians, made a deep impression upon the mountain men. They vowed vengeance upon the faithless chief, but that wily savage eluded their search and had not been caught as late as 1834. This was one of the very few instances of hostility between the Snakes and the whites.¹²

It was on this occasion that Ashley made his explorations south of Great Salt Lake. He went as far as Sevier Lake, which was then given the name of Ashley Lake. Historians

¹² This account, which is from Ferris' *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, states that fifteen men were killed. Page 283, Letter book, Superintendency of Indian affairs, St. Louis, Mo., now in possession of the Kansas Historical Society, gives the number as 17, and happily confirms the event on the authority of Smith, Jackson and Sublette.

have generally supposed that it was Utah Lake which was temporarily honored with the General's name, but this is not the case. It was on the shores of either Utah or Sevier Lake that the trading post stood which Ashley is said to have built.¹³

Having completed these explorations Ashley and Provost turned north en route to the annual rendezvous in the valley of Green river. At some point north of Great Salt Lake, and possibly in the beautiful mountain park known as Cache Valley, an event took place which marked the turning point in Ashley's fortunes. There was in this neighborhood at the time a party of Hudson Bay trappers under the leadership of the well-known trader, Peter Skeen Ogden. They were in possession of a large quantity of beaver fur variously estimated at from seventy to two hundred thousand dollars' worth. These furs, through some transaction now not positively known, came into Ashley's possession at an insignificant price — some say by looting a cache in which they were concealed, and some by voluntary sale to Ashley by Ogden to relieve the latter's necessities.¹⁴ Be that as it may,

¹³ See list of posts, Appendix F.

¹⁴ Common tradition among the traders, which has even survived to the present time, says that Ashley and Provost accidentally came upon a cache of Ogden's fur, and not feeling very well disposed toward the British on general principles, nor believing that they had any business in this quarter, promptly confiscated the fur. One authority says that Ogden was in great straits for some cause or other, and that he sold out to Ashley for a mere nominal sum in order to relieve his necessities. Wyeth says (*Sources of the History of Oregon*, vol. I., p. 74) that a "Mr. Gardner, one of his [Ashley's] agents, met a Mr. Ogden, clerk of the H. B. Co. in the Snake country at the head of a trapping party. Gardner induced the men of Ogden's party to desert by promises of supplies and good prices for furs. The furs thus obtained amounted to about 130 packs, or 13,000 pounds, worth at that time about \$75,000." Beckwourth says that the furs cost Ashley "comparatively little." Audubon quotes Ashley as saying that the disaster at the Aricara villages "proved fortunate for him as it turned his steps toward some other spot where he procured a hundred packs of beaver skins for a mere song."

Of the main fact therefore there is no room for doubt; but the exact

the event was an important one to Ashley. He is said to have been deeply involved in debt at that time, owing to his repeated disasters; but the returns of this year enabled him to pay off his debts and lay the foundations of a goodly fortune.

After the summer rendezvous, which took place in the valley of Green river, Ashley set out with his furs for St. Louis. Upon Provost's advice he went by way of South Pass to the Bighorn river, where he constructed bullboats and descended that stream and the Yellowstone to the Missouri. There he saw for the first time the fort, now in ruins, that Henry had built two years before. He reached the mouth of the Yellowstone on the 19th of August. Here by a most fortunate coincidence he met General Atkinson and Major O'Fallon, who had arrived two days before with a large military force on an official expedition to the various tribes of the Missouri. General Atkinson offered Ashley safe convoy for his furs to Council Bluffs if he would await the return of the expedition. Ashley accepted and accompanied the General on an excursion up the river in search of the Blackfeet and Assiniboines. They returned to the mouth of the Yellowstone August 26th, and on the following morning the whole party set out down the river. No incident of importance occurred on the home journey except that one of the keelboats loaded with Ashley's furs was wrecked on a snag near the mouth of James river, Dakota; the boat and all its cargo were saved. Council Bluffs was reached on the 19th of September. Ashley at this point parted with the military and after three days' rest, resumed his way down the river. He passed Franklin about the 1st of October, and probably reached St. Louis by the 8th. From St. Charles he sent a messenger across the country to

details will probably remain unknown until the world hears from Mr. Ogden through the records of the Hudson Bay Company. That Ogden should voluntarily have disposed of his furs at all, and particularly at a nominal price to an American rival, is scarcely credible to one who knows anything of the business methods of the British companies.

notify Wahrendorff and Tracy, his backers, of his great success.

On the 26th of October Ashley was married to Miss Eliza Christy, and four days later dispatched a party of seventy men to the mountains. Beckwourth, who had returned with Ashley, accompanied this party. He says that on this trip he took the North Fork of the Platte and went by way of South Pass, thus striking Green river much higher than the year before. Ashley remained in St. Louis during the winter.

The rendezvous for 1826 was fixed in Cache valley north of Great Salt Lake in the present state of Utah. Ashley set out for the mountains with another party on the 8th of March, 1826, and is presumed to have followed the route of the North Platte and South Pass. On this trip he took a six-pounder wheeled cannon through to Utah Lake and installed it in his post there.¹⁵ This was the first wheeled vehicle of any description that crossed the plains north of the Santa Fe route.

This was the last journey that Ashley made to the mountains. He evidently had no great love for mountain life and was ambitious of political success. He looked to the mountains mainly for a fortune, and having now secured that he resolved to abandon further personal conduct of affairs there. This he could do without relinquishing his interest in the business. He had developed some of the ablest spirits of the fur trade, men of the highest worth, who later figured prominently in the history of the West. If he could turn over his affairs in the mountains to them, and himself conduct the St. Louis end of the business, it would be more to his own liking, and give these young men a start in their own names. Accordingly he made propositions to the ablest and most experienced of his lieutenants, Jedediah S. Smith, David E. Jackson, and William L. Sublette, and on the 18th

¹⁵ All references to this event by historians place it in the year 1826, but Ashley himself says it was in 1827, although he did not go to the mountains after 1826.

day of July, 1826, articles of agreement were made and signed "near the Grand Lake west of the Rocky mountains." This instrument, which is still in existence,¹⁶ constituted the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette, and marks the beginning of the second period in the history of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The agreement is principally confined to prices of goods, and to arrangements by which Ashley is to supply the firm with merchandise and to dispose of their furs. It also stipulated that Ashley was not to furnish any other company with merchandise so long as it continued in force.

Having completed his arrangements Ashley returned to St. Louis where he arrived on the 9th of September with one hundred and twenty-three packs of beaver. Beckwourth gives the very probable story that upon leaving the mountains Ashley made an affectionate farewell to his men, thanking them for their loyalty to his business and wishing them equal success in their own undertakings.

There was one man, however, who did not reciprocate the General's expressions of good will. This was Etienne Provost, the veteran mountaineer, who had first penetrated to the region of the Great Salt Lake. For some reason he had fallen out with Ashley, possibly from not being included in the new business arrangement. He forthwith set out for St. Louis, arriving there ahead of Ashley, and entered into negotiations with Bernard Pratte and Company by which he was to conduct a rival expedition to the mountains in the following year. Ashley, upon his arrival, nipped this opposition in the bud by himself offering Bernard Pratte and Company a share in his next expedition to the mountains. He agreed to accompany it himself and was to receive a high salary for this service, besides his share in the venture.

In the following April Ashley set out for the mountains but was taken sick on the frontier and compelled to return, leaving the party in other hands. In September following,

¹⁶ In the possession of M. L. Gray of St. Louis. For facsimile of signature see opposite this page.

then this article of agreement to be well understood
and it is understood and agreed between the two
said parties that so long as the said ^{Whitely} continues
to furnish said Smith Jackson & Sells with
Merchandise as aforesaid that he will furnish no other
company or individuals ^{other than those who may be in}

his immediate ^{of Boston} ~~own~~ ^{neighborhood} (Messrs. Smith & Sells)
expresses of
Robert Campbell
J. J. Smith
D. E. Spooner
M. S. Lathrop

when he judged that the return expedition must be near the frontier he left St. Louis to meet it. He returned on October 15th with one hundred and thirty packs of beaver. Smith, Jackson and Sublette had been able to pay off their indebtedness to Ashley and to lay the foundations of comfortable fortunes for themselves, while the net profits of the summer's expedition to Ashley and to Bernard Pratte and Company was seventy per cent.

The brilliant success of General Ashley fairly dazed the staid authorities on the fur trade in St. Louis, and disturbed not a little the equanimity of the great American Fur Company in New York. The correspondence of the traders at this time shows how completely Ashley had fired the minds of every one with visions of wealth no less real than if he had discovered mines of gold.¹⁷ And there was much reason for it. He had brought down in 1824 one hundred packs, in 1826 one hundred and twenty-three packs, in 1827 one hundred and thirty packs. If we add reasonable returns for the years 1823 and 1824, he must have brought in something like five hundred packs of beaver, worth in St. Louis over a quarter of a million dollars. After deducting the cost of the expedition, and all losses, there still remained what at that period was an ample fortune for those engaged in the enterprise. Ashley had acquired a reputation as an authority on the Western fur trade that never afterward deserted him and in his subsequent career in Congress he was looked to as much as was Senator Benton for information upon all measures relating to the West.


¹⁷An interesting example is found in two letters written almost exactly a year apart by Mr. Bostwick, agent of the American Fur Co., to parties in New York. October 5, 1825, he wrote: "Gen. Ashley arrived here yesterday with (as rumor says) 100 packs of Rocky Mountain beaver weighing 9,700 pounds. There is no doubt of the fact. It is said to be of fine quality."

And September 21, 1826: "Fortune has again smiled upon the enterprise of General Ashley. He is within a few days' march of this place with 123 packs of beaver. There is no doubt of the truth of this report; it was brought by some men who came from the mountains with him."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUR COMPANY. ADVENTURES OF JEDEDIAH S. SMITH.

Smith's love of exploration—Starts for California—Trouble with Spanish authorities—Spends winter in California—Leaving party in California Smith returns to Salt Lake—Departs again for California—Party attacked by the Mojaves—Renewed difficulties with Spanish authorities—Spends winter on American Fork—Massacre of his party on the Umpquah—The Hudson Bay Company recovers Smith's property and pays him for it—Smith leaves Fort Vancouver to rejoin his partners—Meeting of the partners.

 **T**HE doings of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company while under the firm name of Smith, Jackson and Sublette, find their chief interest in the adventures of the senior member of the firm. Smith seems to have been in every way a remarkable man. A Christian and a soldier, the Bible and the rifle were his inseparable companions, and the mild teachings of the one never diminished in any way the vigor with which he used the other. The new West captivated his mind with its opportunities for adventure and he made the most of them during the ten years before his untimely death.

Immediately upon the conclusion of the business transactions of 1826 in which Ashley sold out to Smith, Jackson and Sublette, Smith set out on those long and perilous expeditions which absorbed his time for the next three years. Fortunately we have his own account of both of his California visits, which, with numerous sidelights, enable us to present a complete narrative of his wanderings.¹

On the 22nd of August, 1826, Smith left the rendezvous

¹ See letter from Smith to General Clark, written at Great Salt Lake in the summer of 1827 and published in the *Missouri Republican* Octo-

near Great Salt Lake with a party of fifteen men for the purpose of exploring the country to the southwest, then wholly unknown to the American traders. His route lay by Utah Lake, thence across the Sevier valley to the Virgin river,² which he descended to the Colorado. Nothing of importance transpired on this part of his route except the discovery of a remarkable salt cave on the Virgin two days' march above its mouth. Smith crossed to the east bank of the Colorado and followed down the stream until he came upon the Mojave Indians with whom he remained fifteen days to recruit his stock of horses. Recrossing the Colorado at the end of this time he pursued a westerly course, with great hardship and suffering, across the barren and desolate wastes of southern California, and arrived at San Diego, probably about the middle of October.

In California Smith's principal difficulties were with the Spanish authorities, who viewed his presence there with suspicion, and hampered his movements by their arbitrary requirements. Through the interposition of Captain W. H. Cunningham of the *Courier*, of Boston, he obtained permission to purchase the supplies he needed and also to return by the route he had come. Smith was not disposed to leave at once a country which he had come so far to see, and moving back from the coast he turned northwest and traveled

ber 11, 1827; a letter from Captain Cunningham of the ship *Courier* from Boston, dated San Diego, December, 1826, and published in the *Missouri Republican* October 25, 1827; and an account of Smith's second expedition to California in the letter book of Indian Affairs, Superintendency of St. Louis under General Clark, now in possession of the Kansas Historical Society at Topeka, Kansas. There are also numerous briefer references here and there. Bancroft has worked up in considerable detail the doings of the Americans in California during those early days, and as this territory is outside the scope of this work, they will not be touched upon farther than necessary to show when and where Smith was during his wanderings.

² Smith named this stream Adams river in honor of the President. I am inclined to think that its present name was given for Thomas Virgin who was with Smith in 1827, and was severely wounded by the Indians in this locality, and afterward killed in the fight on Umpquah river.

some three hundred miles parallel with the coast, and at a distance from it which he estimated at one hundred and fifty miles. He spent a good part of the winter on this journey and turned it to advantage in trapping. Spring found him in the vicinity of the headwaters of the San Joaquin and Merced rivers.

Early in May he attempted to take his party across Mt. Joseph, as he called the high range of the Sierra Nevada mountains, in order to return to the summer rendezvous of 1827 near Salt Lake; but the deep snows baffled his efforts. He then decided to leave most of his men in California while he should go to the rendezvous and return for them in the fall. With two men, seven horses, and two mules laden with provisions and forage, he set out on his perilous journey May 20, 1827. In eight days he succeeded in crossing the mountains with a loss of only two horses and one mule, the deep snow being hard enough to sustain the weight of the animals. Twenty days more took him to the southwestern extremity of Great Salt Lake along the western shore of which he then bent his course. He reached the rendezvous by the middle of June. The sufferings of the party in crossing the Salt Lake desert were terrible, and only two of the animals survived the journey.

There is no clue given in Smith's account as to the route followed, but it was certainly far south of the Humboldt river. He probably crossed the range near Sonora Pass, going north of Mono Lake and south of Walker Lake. He saw no lakes, but noted a stream flowing north, which was probably Walker river.

Immediately after the rendezvous, Smith set out, July 13, with a small party of eighteen men to return to California and bring back the men he had left there. He followed the route of the previous year and went direct to the Mojave Indians. Unfortunately, since his previous visit, the jealous Spaniard had been there and had warned the Mojaves not to permit any more Americans to pass that way. Smith was ignorant of this, and counting on their former friendly

disposition, was somewhat off his guard. Upon his departure from the village, and while in the act of crossing the river on a raft, the Indians fell upon the party, killing ten men and capturing all the property and papers. This was in the month of August.

Smith now made his way with intense suffering and great peril to the Spanish settlements, which he reached at San Gabriel in nine and one-half days. Here he left two wounded men, and himself started north to join his party.

Two Indian guides whom Smith had secured to conduct him into southern California were seized by the authorities. One died under harsh treatment, and the other was sentenced to death. One of the wounded men, Thomas Virgin, who had been left at San Gabriel, was taken to San Diego and thrown into prison, but was finally released and sent to join Smith.

Upon arriving at the San Jose mission, Smith sought permission to visit the governor at Monterey, but the request was denied, and he was thrown into prison. Presently he was sent under guard to Monterey, where he encountered almost hopeless difficulties with the equivocating governor. Finally, sometime in November, through the intercession of the master of an American vessel, he was given permission to depart, after purchasing the necessary supplies, and was enjoined that he must leave Mexican territory.

The authorities refused to let Smith augment his party, although there were several Englishmen and Americans on the coast who wanted to join him. He left with a party of twenty men, two of whom soon deserted.³ Two months was the period fixed within which he must depart from

³ In the party of 1826 were fifteen men of whom Smith left thirteen when he returned to rendezvous in the summer of 1827. He started back to California with eighteen men of whom he lost ten at the hands of the Mojaves, thus leaving eight, which with the thirteen already in California would make the twenty-one with whom he set out to return in December, 1827. This, however, supposes that there were no other losses than those mentioned, a rather improbable supposition, and Smith may have succeeded in procuring recruits.

Spanish territory, and the general route which he must follow was designated by the authorities. It so happened that this route would take him across the Buenaventura (Sacramento) river, which was then impassable from high water. Smith accordingly took the matter into his own hands, and resolved to pass the winter in that neighborhood. He followed slowly up the course of the river to its principal fork, where he passed several months. From this circumstance the stream came to be known as American Fork. On the 13th of April, 1828, Smith set out in a northwest direction. After reaching the coast he turned north and kept on without noteworthy incident until he reached the Umpquah river. His party did a good deal of trapping on the way, and by this time had secured a large quantity of fur. On the 14th of July Smith left the party in camp and went out alone to search for a road. On his way back he was fired on by some Indians, and although he escaped it was only to find his camp and all the property in the hands of the savages. Fifteen of his men were killed, and only three, including a Mr. Black, escaped.⁴ The survivors had fled north, and Smith was left entirely alone. He made his way in a state of utter destitution to Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia, where he found his companions. The Hudson Bay Company authorities received him with every consideration of generosity, and even sent a force under Thomas McKay to punish the Indians and to recover his property. They succeeded in getting nearly all of it. Doctor McLoughlin charged for this service only the value of the men's time at the rate of sixty dollars a year and four dollars apiece for such horses as were lost on the trip. He purchased Smith's furs, amounting to about \$20,000 worth, at the market price, giving him a draft on London in payment.

⁴Smith says that only Mr. Black escaped, but all other authorities, including particularly Dr. John McLoughlin, the Hudson Bay factor at Fort Vancouver, say three besides Smith. This is probably correct, for Smith's party which numbered 21 when it started from near San Francisco, and lost 2 by desertion, must have numbered 19 on the Umpquah. The number 15 lost checks with the 4 escaped.

Smith remained at Vancouver until March 12, 1829, when he set out for the East to rejoin his partners. He ascended the Columbia, and followed the British fur traders' route to their post among the Flatheads, which Smith had visited in 1824. Thence he and his man Black started south for Snake river. On his way he met Jackson, who was looking for him, and a little later found Sublette, "on the 5th of August, 1829, at the Tetons on Henry Fork, the south branch of the Columbia."

Such is the simple statement as given by Smith himself of his three years' explorations. Much has been written about them, mostly imaginary, and many are the reputed heroic exploits connected with them. That the expeditions were full of romantic interest and thrilling adventure can not be doubted; nor that the little parties, and particularly their leader, endured great hardship and privations. The important results of Smith's work in the cause of geographical discovery will be considered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUR COMPANY.

ITS LATER HISTORY.

Operations of Sublette and Jackson during Smith's absence — Meeting with Smith — Plan of operations — Attacked by the Blackfeet — Trappers assemble on Wind river — Sublette goes to St. Louis — The spring hunt of 1830 — Sublette's journey from the states — Rendezvous of 1830 — Change in business management — Extinction of the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette — Fall hunt of 1830 — Fitzpatrick and Ogden — Winter encampment on Powder river — Spring hunt of 1831 — Fitzpatrick goes to St. Louis and thence to Santa Fe — Fitzpatrick fails to appear at Green river rendezvous — Partners meet in Powder river valley — Opposition of the American Fur Company — Fitzpatrick and Bridger go to head of Snake river — Partners move south to Bear river — Vanderburgh and Drips appear — Rendezvous at Pierre's Hole — Fitzpatrick goes after Sublette — His adventures on his way back — Sublette reaches the rendezvous — Battle of Pierre's Hole — Small party leaves Pierre's Hole — Attacked by Blackfeet — Break-up of the rendezvous — Change in the mountain trade — Fatal results of business rivalry — Rendezvous of 1833 on Green river — Campbell, Sublette and Wyeth set out for St. Louis via the Bighorn river — Robbery of Fitzpatrick and Wyeth — Deplorable state of trade in the mountains — Rendezvous of 1834 — Dissolution of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company — Review of its work — Albert Gallatin's map.

THE whereabouts of Jackson and Sublette during Smith's absence are not fully recorded. At the rendezvous of 1827 they agreed with Smith to meet him at the head of Snake river in the summer of 1829, and in the meanwhile they continued the business as before, going annually to St. Louis with the furs. In the summer of 1828 Sublette went to St. Louis alone, while Jackson remained in the mountains during the winter. In the spring of 1829 Sublette returned

with a large party and outfit of merchandise. The rendezvous for this year was fixed on the Popo Agie river which enters Wind river near the point where the latter stream turns from its southeast course to the north. Forty-two packs of furs were collected here and sent back to St. Louis, arriving there September 5th. Milton G. Sublette was then dispatched with a well-appointed outfit to work up the country along the Bighorn river, while William L. Sublette went on to the beautiful valley of Snake river at the eastern base of the Teton mountains, where he expected to meet Smith and Jackson. Here he found Jackson, who had been there for some time, and had perhaps wintered there, and it is most likely from this date that the name *Jackson Hole* came to be applied to the valley.¹ As Smith failed to put in an appearance, the partners set out to find him. They crossed the mountains into Pierre's Hole and Sublette remained in the vicinity of Henry Fork, while Jackson started in the direction of the Flathead country, thinking that Smith might be returning by that route. He was right in this conjecture, and soon after fell in with Smith and Black. The two partners then started for Sublette's camp, where they arrived, as already narrated, August 5th, 1829. This was perhaps the first time that the beautiful valley of Pierre's Hole came prominently to the notice of American traders.

The united parties remained in Pierre's Hole some time before commencing their fall hunt. In spite of Smith's rough experiences and his several disasters, his work had nevertheless been fairly successful. The humane and generous action of Dr. McLoughlin had saved him the results of his arduous labors, where the code of competition might properly have deprived him of it, and, if he did not bring to his associates a goodly lot of furs, he had in his pocket securities which were even better.

Smith's Christian nature would not permit the benevolent McLoughlin to outdo him in generosity, and he insisted that

¹For a description of this valley see Part V., Chapter II.

the fall hunt of himself and his associates should be made east of the Continental Divide, so as not to trespass upon the territory which the Hudson Bay Company claimed as belonging commercially to them.²

The other parties reluctantly consented, and all set out on their fall hunt in October, taking a northeasterly direction toward the Yellowstone, with the intention of swinging round into the Bighorn basin, where Milton Sublette had been left. Just as they were starting they had a slight brush with the Blackfeet Indians, who attempted to steal their horses. It was a little too early in the morning, before the horses had been turned out to graze, and the Indians were beaten off through the energetic action of Fitzpatrick.

While crossing the range of mountains between the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers, a little to the north of the modern National Park, they had a severe skirmish with the Blackfeet, in which two men were killed, and the rest of the party scattered. It was some time before they all came together again, in fact not until they were east of the mountains and in the Bighorn basin. The journey through the rugged mountains bordering the park on the north was one of great peril and suffering. One of the party, Joseph Meek, became separated from the rest and utterly lost, wandering into the hot springs country just east of the Yellowstone river, where he was found by some of his companions.

At length the party were re-united in the Bighorn basin, where they found Milton Sublette, and all together went south with their furs to the valley of Wind river. It being too late to carry the furs to St. Louis, they were cached in the side of a cut bank. This locality was fixed as the next rendezvous, and thereupon Sublette, with one man, set out for St. Louis to bring out the outfit for the following year. It was about Christmas time that he started on his journey, and he reached his destination on the 11th of February fol-

² Original data on the doings of this year are exceedingly few and I have mainly relied on Mrs. Victor's *River of the West* for them as also for numerous details relating to the three following years.

lowing.³ This is one of the very few examples at this early day of crossing the plains in the dead of winter.

The party which remained behind was too large to find subsistence in one locality, there being no buffalo in the vicinity, and Smith and Jackson were compelled to shift their camp, although in mid-winter, to better ground. They accordingly went over into the Powder river country, where they found buffalo and spent the winter in plenty. On the 1st of April Jackson set out for a spring hunt at his old stamping ground in Jackson Hole, while Smith, with young Jim Bridger as guide, started by way of the Yellowstone for the upper Missouri. Smith went as far as to the Judith basin, made a successful hunt, and returned to the rendezvous on Wind river without any untoward accident. Jackson likewise came back after a successful hunt, and here the two partners waited the arrival of Sublette from the States.⁴ At about this time an unfortunate accident occurred. While removing the furs from the cache made the previous December, the bank caved in, killing one man and severely injuring another.

Sublette left St. Louis April 10th with eighty-one men mounted on mules, ten wagons with merchandise drawn by five mules each, two dearborns of one mule each, and twelve head of cattle and one milch cow for their support until they should reach the buffalo country. This was the advent of wagons on the Oregon Trail, although they had already been used for eight years on the Santa Fe Trail. The party arrived at rendezvous on the 16th of July without any difficulty, and the letter of the partners referred to in the above

³ The following interesting scrap, referring to Sublette's arrival, taken from the correspondence of the times shows the unaccommodating attitude of rival traders toward each other. Chouteau, writing to Astor, thus refers to Sublette's arrival: "Je l'ai beaucoup questionné. Je n'ai rien obtenu de satisfaisant. Il me regard toujours comme un opposant."

⁴ For a description of the journey to rendezvous in 1830 I rely upon a joint letter of Smith, Jackson and Sublette to the Hon. John H. Eaton, Secretary of War, dated St. Louis, Oct. 29, 1830, and published in Sen. Doc. 39, 21st Cong., 2nd Sess.

note says that "here the wagons could easily have crossed the Rocky mountains, it being what is called the *Southern Pass*, had it been desirable for them to do so."⁵

The business of the rendezvous was this year particularly important. Smith, Jackson and Sublette, following the example of Ashley four years before, relinquished their trade and sold out to several younger men, who had now become distinguished by their ability and experience. These were Thomas Fitzpatrick, Milton G. Sublette, Henry Fraeb, Jean Baptiste Gervais, and James Bridger, and the new firm was called the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, the only instance where any firm did business under this specific name. The transfer of the business from the old to the new firm took place August 4, 1830. Smith, Jackson, and Sublette left the same day for St. Louis with one hundred and ninety packs of beaver. They arrived October 10th, bringing back the ten wagons, four of the cattle, and the milch cow.

In the following year they embarked in the Santa Fe trade, but Smith was slain in the Cimarron desert by the Comanches soon after and the firm was thus dissolved. Jackson formed a partnership with David E. Waldo, and is said to have taken a party soon after to California. He here disappears from the field of our inquiries. Sublette returned to St. Louis and for several years supplied the Rocky Mountain Fur Company with their outfits and brought back and marketed their furs.

The history of the new Rocky Mountain Company during the four years of its existence is difficult to trace. It carried on a wild and roving trade, and its numerous bands of trappers overspread the entire mountain region. No attempt

⁵ The writers refer to the rendezvous as being at the "head of Wind river," which, with the above statement that it was near the Southern Pass, is somewhat confusing. It is possible that the "head of Wind river" was the head of the Popo Agie, and that Southern Pass was the South Pass at the head of the Sweetwater where that name was always thereafter applied. The rendezvous would hardly have been fixed at the head of Wind river near either of the two passes to be found there.

will be made to do more than follow the wanderings of the more important parties.

As soon as Smith, Jackson, and Sublette had left the Wind river rendezvous in August, 1830, the new firm organized its campaign for the ensuing autumn. Fraeb and Gervais led a party south into the mountains of Colorado, and nothing is known of their exact whereabouts until the next rendezvous. Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Bridger, with a party of over two hundred men, moved north through the Bighorn basin, crossed the Yellowstone river, and continued in a northwesterly direction until they reached the Missouri river in the vicinity of the Great Falls. Turning south they ascended the Missouri to the Three Forks, and then followed the Jefferson Fork to the Divide. The expedition was a successful one, and a large quantity of furs was taken, while the formidable appearance of the party kept the Blackfeet from attacking it.

Crossing the Divide the trappers continued their course south for several hundred miles, and finally reached Ogden's Hole on the northeast shore of Great Salt Lake. Here, it is said, they fell in with Peter Skeen Ogden, the same Hudson Bay Company trader whom Ashley had relieved of his furs five years before. Fitzpatrick proceeded without delay to follow his old leader's example, if not in method, at least in the results obtained. As the Hudson Bay Company did not permit the use of liquor in the trade, except along the international boundary, Ogden was quite helpless to oppose Fitzpatrick, who, without the slightest scruple, debauched his men with liquor and soon secured the product of a year's hunt for comparatively nothing. After this profitable but discreditable stroke of business the party left Ogden's Hole and crossed the country to the eastward in time to reach the valley of Powder river before winter set in. An idea of the lengthy journeys which these parties were wont to make may be had from the present instance in which the distance traveled by Fitzpatrick and his party during their fall hunt could not have been less than twelve hundred miles.

The Powder river valley was always a favorite wintering ground, because game, especially buffalo, was usually plentiful there, and the grazing was good. The partners remained there all winter, excepting Fraeb and Gervais, who returned to their hunting grounds in the south. During the winter an express was sent to St. Louis.

With the opening of the spring of 1831 the partners again set out for the Blackfoot country, but they had not gone far when most of their horses were stolen by the Crows. A catastrophe of this kind, so fatal to the mobility of a party, destroyed its effectiveness, and it was imperative to retake the horses. A party was organized for this purpose, and, after considerable delay and a good deal of adroit management, succeeded not only in retaking their own horses, but in capturing those belonging to the Indians.

Shortly after this affair Fitzpatrick left with one man for St. Louis to bring out the annual supplies to the rendezvous appointed for this year in Green river valley. He traveled by land and passed Council Bluffs about April 19th. Upon his arrival at St. Louis he was prevailed upon to accompany Smith, Jackson, and Sublette to Santa Fe, from which point he would take his outfit to the rendezvous. Under this unfortunate arrangement he accompanied the disastrous expedition in which Smith lost his life, and finally, after long and vexatious delays, he left Santa Fe with his merchandise, still almost as far from the rendezvous as he was at St. Louis. He traveled north along the eastern base of the mountains and reached the North Platte river near the mouth of the Laramie late in the year.

In the meanwhile Sublette and Bridger prosecuted their spring hunt, swinging round among the mountains on very much the same circuit as that followed in the previous autumn. In due time they reached the place of rendezvous on Green river, where they met Fraeb and Gervais, who had now been absent for about a year. As Fitzpatrick did not appear it was decided that Fraeb should go to meet him. After a long search and a good deal of wandering among

the Black Hills, he finally met Fitzpatrick just as the latter arrived at Platte river. Sublette and Bridger, despairing of seeing Fitzpatrick, had already broken up the rendezvous and betaken themselves to the Powder river country for the winter. Hither Fitzpatrick and Fraeb bent their course, and in a short time the five partners were again gathered together.

Their prospects for a quiet winter in the plentiful country of Powder river were not to be realized. A cloud of black portent was gathering in the hitherto unclouded horizon of the company's affairs. It was at about this time that they began to feel the presence of that rival who finally drove them out of the business. In another chapter will be given an account of the steady and resistless progress of the American Fur Company up the Missouri and into the mountains, where it sought to share the rich harvest hitherto garnered by the Rocky Mountain traders alone. Its first essays in the mountains were conducted by three partisans, Vanderburgh, Drips, and Fontenelle, whose names became familiar in the annals of the trade. The policy of these leaders when they first entered the country was to follow the parties of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and learn from them where the best trapping country lay. It was an underhand method of conducting business, and it led to some desperate and tragic situations.

It was in the fall of 1831 and in the Powder river country that the tactics of these interlopers became apparent. Vanderburgh and Drips had followed hard upon the trail of Fraeb and Fitzpatrick and went into camp in their immediate neighborhood. Fitzpatrick and his associates, indignant at this action, quietly stole out of the country, and by forced marches traveled west for upwards of four hundred miles to the forks of Snake river, having fixed their next rendezvous in the valley of Pierre's Hole. They spent the winter trading with the Flathead and Nez Perce Indians, unannoyed by the presence of their competitors.

Early in the year 1832, the most eventful year in the

Rocky Mountain fur trade, Fitzpatrick and his partners set out upon their spring hunt. Their course lay up the valley of the Snake to the mouth of Salt river and up the latter stream for a distance, when they crossed over into the valley of John Gray (now called John Day) river. Ascending this stream to its source, the party passed over a range of mountains into the valley of Bear river. Here, to their disgust, they found Vanderburgh and Drips, who were evidently trying to find them. It was resolved to strike off into some other section at once. Sublette unluckily was severely wounded in an affray with an Indian, and was compelled to stay behind. Joseph Meek remained to take care of him, and it was not until several months afterward that he was able to rejoin his companions, who, after their spring hunt, had assembled at the annual rendezvous in the valley of Pierre's Hole.⁶

Here, to their infinite vexation, Vanderburgh and Drips turned up again, and as it would soon be time for the various bands of trappers and Indians to assemble, it was of the utmost importance to receive the annual convoy of goods from St. Louis before their rivals should capture the trade. William L. Sublette had contracted to bring out the outfit, and in order to hurry him up it was decided that Fitzpatrick should go to meet him. He set out at once and met Sublette on the Platte river below the mouth of the Laramie, a distance of some four hundred miles from Pierre's Hole. On their way back, June 13, Fitzpatrick hired a party of men at Laramie river belonging to the firm of Gant and Blackwell, who had experienced a most unfortunate campaign at trapping during the previous winter.

When the joint party arrived at the Sweetwater, Fitzpatrick went on ahead entirely alone to carry the news of Sublette's approach to rendezvous. It was a hazardous enterprise in that dangerous country. Fitzpatrick led a very fleet horse already saddled and equipped, while he rode another, so that the first might be at all times fresh for a

⁶ For a description of this beautiful valley, see Part V., Chapter II.

chase if necessary. Everything went well until he reached the valley of Green river, where he came suddenly upon a party of Blackfeet Indians. Mounting the led horse he galloped to the mountains and concealed himself in a defile. After waiting three days he came out from his retreat only to fall in with the Indians again. This time he lost his other horse in making his escape together with all the equipments which were attached to his saddle. Even his blankets were lost, and he saved only his rifle and the single charge which it contained. He barely succeeded in saving himself by crawling among the rocks and cliffs of the mountains. Here he remained for several days, when he finally emerged and made his way on foot in utter destitution toward the rendezvous. His sole resource for food must have been berries and roots. His moccasins wore out and he made others with his hat. In swimming one of the rivers, probably the Snake, he lost his rifle. At length, when nearly used up, he was met by two Iroquois hunters, who helped him to rendezvous on one of their horses. He arrived so emaciated as scarcely to be recognized. Sublette was already there, and the partners were thoroughly alarmed over his absence.

The caravan of William L. Sublette reached the rendezvous on the 8th of July. There were already present the various parties of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company numbering between one and two hundred men. The American Fur Company was represented by a large party under Vanderburgh and Drips. Nathaniel J. Wyeth⁷ with his raw New Englanders was there, while the neighboring plains were covered with the tents of free trappers and bands of Indians. The trading proceeded briskly and much to the advantage of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, for Fontenelle had not yet arrived with the annual supplies for Vanderburgh and Drips, and they were therefore not well prepared to compete with their rivals.

On the 17th of July the rendezvous began to break up. Milton Sublette was to lead a party into the country north

⁷ See Chapter XXV., this Part.

of the Salt Lake desert. As his route would lie for a long distance in the valley of Snake river, Wyeth decided to accompany him for protection as far as their ways ran together. A free trapper by the name of Sinclair with fifteen men also started with them. The first day they proceeded about eight miles up the valley, intending to bear off to the south on the following morning. Just as they were about to resume their march, July 18, they saw Indians approaching, who proved to be a band of the dreaded Grosventres. A parley ensued during which Antoine Godin killed a chief who had come forward, and thus precipitated the Battle of Pierre's Hole, which raged the remainder of the day. It was a hard fought struggle, and the most noted battle between the Indians and the traders that ever took place in the mountains. Among the casualties on the part of the whites was the partisan Sinclair killed, and William L. Sublette wounded. The Blackfeet withdrew during the night.⁸

This unexpected event delayed the departure from the rendezvous. On the 25th of July a portion of Wyeth's party, who had decided to return home, became impatient of delay, and set out with Alfred K. Stephens and a small party of free trappers for Jackson Hole. The next day they were attacked by the Blackfeet, and two of their party were killed, while Stephens was mortally wounded.

Milton Sublette and Gervais, with Sinclair's free trappers and Wyeth's reduced party, left on the 24th. William L. Sublette's wound had so far healed that he was enabled to start for St. Louis on the 30th. He took with him a large pack train and one hundred and sixty-eight packs of beaver. Fitzpatrick and Bridger left for the headwaters of the Missouri hoping to elude their rivals. Vanderburgh and Drips set out in all haste, August 2nd, to find Fontenelle and secure their equipment, before Fitzpatrick and Bridger should get too far away. They found Fontenelle on Green river, August 8th, and four days later started back to

⁸ For a full account of this battle see Part IV., Chapter II.

Pierre's Hole. Fraeb probably went back to the sources of Grand river in the Colorado mountains.

The rendezvous in Pierre's Hole was one of the most important of those singular gatherings ever held in the mountains, and it marked the turning point in the Rocky mountain trade. A great change was beginning to come over the business. The field was no longer to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company alone. The powerful opposition of the American Fur Company had evidently come to stay. Wyeth had entered the country, and although his present opposition amounted to nothing, there was no telling what a man of his energy might not yet accomplish. Finally, there was Captain Bonneville, backed by New York capitalists, invading the mountains with a formidable party. The opposition of the Hudson Bay Company was nothing to that now pouring in from the East. The old order of things was gone. Henceforth there was to be bitter competition, all the more to be dreaded because it most likely meant the ruin of the business.

It is needless to follow in detail the wanderings of the various parties who left the rendezvous of Pierre's Hole in 1832. Milton Sublette and Gervais spent the summer and autumn in the country to the southwest. Fitzpatrick and Bridger, in their trapping ground on Jefferson Fork, soon had the mortification to find Vanderburgh and Drips on their trail again. They had offered at rendezvous to divide the trapping territory with them, but this offer had been declined, probably because the newcomers preferred to use their experienced rivals to pilot them to the best beaver country. Fitzpatrick and Bridger promptly pulled up their stakes and sought again to get away, but to no purpose. Becoming utterly exasperated they resolved to lead their opponents a chase which would teach them a lesson. Plunging into the very heart of the Blackfoot country they lured their rivals from one point to another until they were attacked by the Indians and Vanderburgh was slain.⁹ Bridger was himself

⁹ For the story of this lamentable tragedy see Part IV., Chapter III.

attacked soon after and barely escaped with his life. He received a severe wound and carried an arrowhead in his back for two years after.

Winter found the various parties of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, except possibly that of Fraeb, again together in the Snake river valley. In the following spring they made their usual hunt and in due time gathered at the annual rendezvous appointed for this year (1833) at the head of Green river. This was another great gathering,¹⁰ for besides the two leading companies there were present Captain Bonneville's company, numerous free trappers, a party of sportsmen under an English officer, Captain Stuart,¹¹ Nathaniel J. Wyeth, then on his way back home, and Robert Campbell, with a party and outfit just from St. Louis — in all about three hundred white men. There was besides a small village of Snake Indians. The rendezvous was in full activity as early as June 15th, and continued until June 24th.

On the latter date Robert Campbell, Fitzpatrick, and Mil-

¹⁰ "I should have been proud of my countrymen if you could have seen the American Fur Company or the party of Mr. Campbell. For efficiency of goods, men, animals and arms I do not believe the fur business has afforded a better example." Wyeth at Green river rendezvous 1833, July 18.

In spite of this excellent character, however, Wyeth expressed his opinion in the same letter that things were in such a state that life was unsafe and that there was "a great majority of scoundrels" among the various companies.

¹¹ This Captain Stuart is often mentioned in the correspondence of the fur trade and he was much liked by the mountain men. His full name and title, as given by a contemporary authority, was Sir William Drummond Stuart, Bart. His home was in Perthshire, Scotland, where he lived for many years after his adventures in America. There is a tradition that he published a journal of his experiences. If he did, the work would be well worth reading, as it could not fail to be useful historical authority.

In the same party with Captain Stuart was another character also frequently mentioned. This was Dr. Benjamin Harrison, who had gone to the mountains apparently to recuperate his health. He was a son of Gen. William Henry Harrison.

ton Sublette, with fifty-five packs of beaver, accompanied by Nathaniel J. Wyeth and Captain Stuart, left for the Bighorn river. It was intended to return to St. Louis by way of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, probably in order to meet William L. Sublette, who was coming up the river this year with a strong outfit in opposition to the American Fur Company. Wyeth says that this route was selected because of the danger from the Aricara Indians, who were at this time infesting the Platte route with their marauding parties. At a point on the Bighorn river, where a stop was made to prepare bullboats for the further journey by water, and where Fitzpatrick parted company with Campbell and Milton Sublette, a contract was entered into between the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and Nathaniel J. Wyeth, August 14th, 1833, by which the latter agreed to bring out three thousand dollars' worth of merchandise to their rendezvous on Green river in the following year. Sublette, Campbell, and Wyeth then went on by boat and arrived in due time at the mouth of the Yellowstone, where they met W. L. Sublette with his opposition outfit. Campbell and Milton Sublette remained behind with him and Wyeth went on alone.

The various bands of trappers now scouring the mountains made their usual fall hunt, doing everything that they could to hamper each other's movements. Only one incident of the fall campaign will be noticed and that because it illustrates so well the desperate measures which the fur companies were now using toward each other. After Fitzpatrick had bidden goodbye to his associates on the Bighorn river he set out for the valley of Tongue river, where he expected to find the Crow village, in order to secure their permission to make his fall hunt in their country. "But before I had time," says Fitzpatrick, "for form or ceremony of any kind, they robbed me and my men of everything we possessed."¹²

¹² "A letter from Captain Stuart near the Crow village in September states . . . that Fitzpatrick was robbed of 100 horses, all his mer-

Fitzpatrick openly charged the American Fur Company with having instigated this outrage; the Indians confessed the fact and the company's agent admitted it, and still the only evidence of any restitution that has come to our notice is in the following extract from a letter by McKenzie to Samuel Tulloch, agent of the company among the Crows, dated Fort Union, January 8, 1834: "The 43 Beaver skins traded, marked, 'R. M. F. Co.,' I would in the present instance give up if Mr. Fitzpatrick wishes to have them, on his paying the price the articles traded for them were worth on their arrival in the Crow village, and the expense of bringing the beaver in and securing it. My goods are brought in to the country to trade and I would as willingly dispose of them to Mr. Fitzpatrick as to any one else for beaver or beaver's worth, if I get my price. I make this proposal as a favor, not as a matter of right, for I consider the Indians entitled to trade any beaver in their possession to me or to any other trader." A most condescending "favor," to be sure! After having instigated the robbery, and then having gotten the plunder, to restore it to its rightful owner upon payment of its value in the Indian trade, was a mark of generosity which ought not to be omitted from the credit of the American Fur Company!

But if the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had just cause for indignation at this outrageous treatment, they were on their part equally careless of their own business obligations. Milton Sublette went to Boston during the following winter, and under his direction and advice Wyeth made up the invoice of merchandise which he had contracted to take to the mountains. In the following summer these two gentlemen were crossing the plains together on their way to the Green river rendezvous. Unfortunately Sublette was compelled to go back on account of illness. William L. Sublette in the meanwhile strained every nerve to reach the

chandise, some beaver and traps, his capote, and even his watch. That party can consequently make no hunt this fall." Kenneth McKenzie to Pierre Chouteau, Fort Union, December 10, 1833.

mountains ahead of Wyeth. In this he succeeded and induced Fitzpatrick to refuse to stand by his bargain with Wyeth. The latter was thus left with a large quantity of merchandise on his hands which he had brought to this point under a written agreement with the company who now arbitrarily refused to receive it.

Outrages of this sort show to what a state the fur trade had now degenerated. Unrestrained competition had filled the mountains with rival companies, each using every effort, regardless of honor, to undermine the power of the rest. It became as much as one's life was worth to change service from one company to another, and it is stated that murders were committed on account of these rivalries. The Indians were utterly demoralized by the strange conduct of the whites toward each other and of course lost all confidence in them. They became more lawless and less industrious, and even the friendly tribes could no longer be depended upon.

In proportion as these unfavorable conditions increased the profits of the trade fell off, and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company could now clearly see that its business was on the decline. It was, moreover, the dupe of those on whom it had placed its chief reliance. The elder Sublette and his partner, Robert Campbell, were shrewdly drawing into their own hands the profits of the trade. By virtue of their arrangements with the Mountain Company for bringing out supplies and marketing the furs, they controlled the entire situation and turned into their own coffers the hard-earned profits of others.¹³

It was amid discouraging conditions like these that the Rocky Mountain Fur Company met in annual rendezvous

¹³ Significant of this fact is the following letter from Nathaniel J. Wyeth to M. G. Sublette, Ham's Fork, July 1st, 1834, after Fitzpatrick had refused to stand by Wyeth's contract with Sublette. "Now, Milton, business is closed between us, but you will find that you have only bound yourself over to receive your supplies at such a price as may be inflicted upon you, and that all you will ever make in this country will go to pay for your goods. You will be kept, as you have been, a mere slave to catch beaver for others."

in the summer of 1834. A dissolution of the partnership was agreed upon. Henry Fraeb sold out his interest for "forty head of horse beast, forty beaver traps, eight guns, and one thousand dollars' worth of merchandise." Gervais followed suit "in consideration of twenty head of horse beast, thirty beaver traps, and five hundred dollars' worth of merchandise." The remaining partners formed a new firm under the style of Fitzpatrick, Sublette and Bridger, assuming all responsibilities of the old company. This firm is scarcely known in the history of the times and continued only for a very brief time. It may be doubted if it was a legal partnership at all, for it was formed without the knowledge or consent of one of the members, M. G. Sublette, who was absent at the time and whose signature to the instrument evidencing the agreement was put in by some one else.

The annual rendezvous in Green river valley in the summer of 1834 marks the end of the career of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, Sublette and Bridger in

¹⁴ The firm of Sublette and Campbell can not be considered as a Rocky Mountain Company but rather as an opposition to the American Fur Company on the Missouri. Its history will be considered with that of the latter company.

The document here reproduced (see page 864) marks as definitely the end of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company as did Ashley's advertisement in 1822 its beginning. A letter written by Lucien Fontenelle at Bellevue to Pierre Chouteau September 17, 1834, discusses several interesting points in the present connection and is one of the very few surviving letters written by that romantic character: "I arrived here three days ago with my expedition and returns from the mountains for the last year. I shall be able in a few days more to ship the beaver down. I am waiting for the boat which is now building at the Oto post. It is probable that you may wish to have the beaver insured and I am extremely sorry that I can not give you the correct weight. However, the number of skins I have amount to 5,309 beaver, 90 of otter, 18 of bear, 130 of muskrats, and about 150 pounds of castorum. I hardly think it necessary to have them insured, although the river is very low, but the boat will be very strong, and will have a double crew formed of the very best kind of voyageurs under the eyes of Mr. Cabanne, and the superintendence of Etienne Provost.

the following year bought out the post built by Sublette and Campbell in the fall of 1834 on the Laramie and entered the service of the American Fur Company. In 1836 Milton Sublette died and the firm was dissolved, the surviving partners taking individual service with the great company on the Missouri.

From the date of Ashley's first essay in the fur trade to the dissolution of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was a period of only twelve years. What did the company accomplish during this short time, and what is its proper place in western history?

In the matter of trade it opened up one of the wealthiest

"I am sorry to say that I would have sent down more beaver had it not been for the misfortune of losing a cache in which there were eight or ten packs lost, destroyed by wolves and bears, and eight or ten packs more which we have lost by the rascality of a few men, who were largely indebted to us and who traded their fall's hunt with other companies during the winter as it happened they did not winter near any of our parties. I am in hopes that it will not so happen in the future as I have so arranged that it will be hard for any of them to defraud us hereafter.

"You must have heard before this of the returns that were made by Mr. Sublette and the company of Bonneville and Company. The latter I think by next year will be at an end with the mountains. They have sent down from twelve to fourteen packs of beaver and admitting that it should sell at a high price it is not enough to pay their retiring hands. Wm. Sublette takes down about forty packs. The heretofore arrangements between him and Messrs. Fitzpatrick, Milton Sublette and others having expired last spring, they have concluded not to have anything more to do with William Sublette and it will surprise me much if he takes more than ten packs down next year. I have entered into a partnership with the others and the whole of the beaver caught by them is to be turned over to us by agreement made with them in concluding the arrangement. William Sublette has built such a fort as Fort Clark (Mandans) on Laramie's Fork of the River Platte and can make it a central place for the *Sioux* and *Cheyenne* trade. He has now men running after these Indians to bring them to the River Platte. Buffalo is in abundance on that river during all seasons of the year, and the situation may turn out to be an advantageous one for the trade." . . .

Fontenelle.

fur sections of the West. Its operations were confined almost exclusively to the procuring of beaver fur and this was mainly obtained by its own trappers rather than by trade from the Indians. From all available data it is probable that this company under its various names procured and shipped to St. Louis upwards of a thousand packs of beaver worth about five hundred thousand dollars. Through the business arrangements by which the trade was conducted most of the profits found their way into the pockets of the St. Louis parties, particularly Ashley and William L. Sublette. Milton Sublette, Fitzpatrick, Gervais, Fraeb and Bridger evidently made no great amount of money. They did the work and endured the hardships, but their earnings served mainly to augment the fortunes of others.

As a school of adventure the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had no parallel among the business concerns of the mountains. The campaign with the Aricaras, the adventures of Hugh Glass, Mike Fink, and Etienne Provost, the wanderings of Jedediah S. Smith, the battle of Pierre's Hole, and innumerable other romantic incidents have made famous the career of this notable company. Some idea of the perils incurred in their numberless adventures may be judged from the loss of life among their employes. From 1822 to 1829 inclusive these losses amounted to seventy men, none of whom died natural deaths. The number who lost their lives in the later career of the company would certainly bring the total up to one hundred. The losses of property amounted probably to one hundred thousand dollars.

The cause of geographical knowledge owes a great deal to this company. The whole country around the sources of the Platte, Green, Yellowstone and Snake rivers and in the region around Great Salt Lake was opened up by them. Their adventurers gave names to the Sweetwater river, Independence Rock, Jackson Hole, and the tributaries of Green river and Great Salt Lake. They discovered this lake and also South Pass. They were the first to descend Green river by boat, and likewise the first, after Colter, to enter

the Yellowstone Wonderland. They were the first to travel from Great Salt Lake southwesterly to southern California, the first to cross the Sierras and the deserts of Utah and Nevada between California and Great Salt Lake, and the first, so far as is known, to travel by land up the Pacific coast from San Francisco to the Columbia. They were indefatigable explorers and considering the fact that most of them made no records of what they did, the impress which they have left upon the geography of the west is surprisingly great.¹⁵

¹⁵ This is a fitting place to pay a deserved tribute to Albert Gallatin for a work in the cause of geographical knowledge which seems to have attracted very little attention, in spite of the fact that it accompanies that writer's celebrated *Synopsis of the Indian Tribes of North America*, which forms the basis of all later work upon the ethnography and philology of the American Indians. In this work Gallatin discusses the geography of the Far West with the new light which he had obtained from Gen. Ashley and Jedediah S. Smith. Ashley sent him a "manuscript map accompanied with numerous explanatory notes," and he also secured a statement from Smith as to the latter's observations. The result of this information, which Gallatin embodied in a map prepared and drawn by himself, was to settle many, and in fact nearly all, the important unknown and disputed questions in regard to the geography of the western portion of what is now United States territory. Among the points especially noted were the following: That the sources of the Rio Grande del Norte were not above 39 degrees north latitude; that the sources of the Colorado of the West were as far north as 43 degrees; that Lake Timpanago, or Great Salt Lake, had no outlet to the Pacific ocean and no tributary on its west shore, but two important ones from the east; that there was another salt lake without an outlet about 80 miles south of the southernmost point of Great Salt Lake; that the course of the far-famed Buenaventura river, which was long supposed to drain some great central lake, was confined to the Pacific coast, and, far from being east and west, was in reality from north to south; that the Multanmah, or Willamette river, long supposed to rise near Great Salt Lake, was also a Pacific coast stream only; that the Owyhee river took its rise west of and at no great distance from the Great Salt Lake; and finally that the whole country between Great Salt Lake and the Sierra Nevada mountains was of sandy, desert character with only a few wild Indians, "the most miserable objects in creation."

When it is considered that this information was given to the world in 1836, a year before Captain Bonneville's map, which claims credit

But perhaps the most important service which the company rendered its country was as a school for the education of those who were later to ~~assist the government~~ in the exploration of the West. It was to the old members and employes of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company that the government looked mainly for its guides when it entered those regions for the first time. It owes them a debt which the salaries paid for their services very inadequately measure.

for nearly all of it, was published, one may easily judge of its importance in the evolution of our Western geography. We shall further treat of this matter in our sketch of Captain Bonneville's work.

For a *résumé* of existing knowledge concerning the discovery of Great Salt Lake see Part V., Chapter IV.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AMERICAN FUR COMPANY.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WESTERN DEPARTMENT.

Astor purchases interest in Mackinaw Company—Foreigners excluded from the United States fur trade—Astor buys out Northwest interests in United States—The Mackinaw letter books—Farnham's outfit confiscated—Suit against Colonel Chambers—Opposition of St. Louis traders—Russell Farnham—Negotiations with St. Louis parties—Western Department established at St. Louis. 1822

THE American Fur Company was incorporated by Act of the Legislature of New York, April 6, 1808. Mr. Astor was the company and the incorporation was merely "a fiction intended to broaden and facilitate his operations." Hitherto Mr. Astor's relation to the trade had been rather that of a merchant, buying from the producers and shipping to various parts of the world for sale to the consumers. He now began to enter the trade on a broader scale, producing the furs by means of his own operations in the field. But in his efforts to establish himself in the region along the Great Lakes, then the richest fur country yet opened up within the limits of the United States, he encountered a formidable obstacle in the presence of the Mackinaw Company whose headquarters were at Michilimackinac, in the strait between Lakes Huron and Michigan. Although there were no longer British troops south of the boundary, the laws of the United States did not exclude British traders, and the Mackinaw Company had firmly established itself in all the country about the Great Lakes and the headwaters of the Mississippi. In order to neutralize to some extent the power of this company Mr. Astor found it necessary to pur-

chase an interest in it. He was doubtless enabled to do this because the British traders understood that it was in line with the wishes of the American government, and they preferred to yield a share of their business to American traders rather than lose it all as they might do if Congress should exclude foreigners from the trade within the United States. Accordingly Mr. Astor and certain partners of the Northwest Company bought out the Mackinaw Company and organized a new association under Mr. Astor's charter and called it the Southwest Company.¹ The name was given in contradistinction to the British Company which did business in the country to the north and west. Under this arrangement Mr. Astor held a two-thirds interest in the trade within the United States with the understanding that it was all to fall into his hands at the expiration of five years. Scarcely had the new arrangement gone into effect when its operations were suspended by the War of 1812.

Another comprehensive enterprise which Mr. Astor organized under his general charter was the Pacific Fur Company whose career has already been sketched in these pages. This enterprise also was ruined by the war and Mr. Astor found himself in 1815 scarcely a whit advanced in his schemes over three years before. He now began to gather up the scattered fragments of his business on the lakes. The better to advance his interests in this quarter he urged, and was largely instrumental in, the passage of an Act by Congress excluding foreigners from participating in the fur trade of the United States except in subordinate capacities under American traders. After the passage of this Act, April 29, 1816, it became necessary for the Northwest Company to relinquish their interests on American territory. Mr. Astor stood ready to accommodate them in this regard and it has often been said that he seized the opportunity to

¹The names of the Mackinaw traders seem to have been Cameron, Fraser, Dickson, and Rolette, the last two becoming prominent at a later date in the American Fur Company. Astor gave them a one-third interest in the new Southwest Company.

recoup himself for the losses forced upon him by that company on the Pacific in 1813. Be that as it may the American Fur Company succeeded to the interests of the Northwest and Southwest Companies in 1816 and in the following year the new organization went into effect.²

The field of operations which had its base at Mackinaw and embraced the region of the Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi, and, what is not generally known, a considerable tract of territory on the east shore of Lake Huron, is not within the scope of this work. It is referred to here only to show the course of events connecting the operations of the Pacific Fur Company with those of the Western Department of the American Fur Company with headquarters at St. Louis. But as nearly ten years elapsed from the downfall of Astoria to the final establishment of Mr. Astor's business at St. Louis, a brief outline of intervening events is essential to a proper exposition of the subject. Luckily the necessary data for such an outline are still extant in the form of two ponderous letter books of the American Fur Company which the visitor at Mackinaw Island may now see in the John Jacob Astor Hotel.³ The letters are almost entirely those of Ramsay Crooks and Robert Stuart, the larger part having been written by Crooks. The books seem to have accompanied Crooks in his travels between New York, Michilimackinac and St. Louis, as the many different hand-writings of copyists and the varieties of ink used sufficiently attest. The first letter is dated September 18, 1816, and the last July 29, 1825; but the period most thoroughly covered embraces only the years 1817-23, including, however, the entire period from the dissolution of the Southwest Company to the establishment of the Western Department of the

² Crooks, in a letter dated in May or June, 1817, says: "The business of the Southwest Company, heretofore conducted by Mr. Pierre D. Rocheblave, is now managed by myself, and in consequence a transfer has been made of all the property of that concern."

³ For an opportunity to examine these books the author is indebted to their owner, Mr. Claude Cable, proprietor of the John Jacob Astor Hotel.

American Fur Company in St. Louis. The course of events which led to the final opening up of the Missouri branch of the trade will be told as far as possible in the language of these letters.

In the new arrangement the old Pacific Fur Company partners and clerks came again prominently to the front. Ramsay Crooks became the general agent of the company associated with Robert Stuart on apparently equal terms. Russell Farnham became the company's chief representative on the Mississippi. W. W. Mathews was their agent in Montreal for the hiring of employes. Franchère was offered a berth but was forced to defer acceptance for a time pending the fulfillment of a prior engagement with the Northwest Company. Of the new men who bore an important part in the operations of the new company, the most prominent were the Abbott brothers, James and Samuel, of Detroit. Both were able men and both rendered the company excellent service.

Crooks, Stuart, and Farnham joined in the campaign of 1817. Crooks himself spent most of the summer on Mackinaw Island organizing the business. No incident of special importance occurred during this year except in the case of Farnham, who had been selected to manage the business on the Mississippi. The long standing jealousy of the St. Louis traders toward Mr. Astor's company had been communicated in some degree to the government officials stationed in St. Louis charged with the conduct of Indian affairs. While the Act of 1816 excluded British traders, it did not prevent the engagement of foreigners in the service of American traders. The American Fur Company very largely recruited its force from Montreal and Farnham's Mississippi company was composed mainly of Canadians. The authorities near St. Louis seized upon this fact as a violation of the law. The measures which they took to enforce the law as they interpreted it are thus described by Crooks in a letter to Governor Cass, dated New York, April 15, 1818: "Colonel Talbot Chambers of the Rifle Regi-

ment, having last summer thought proper to deny the power of the Agent of Indian Affairs, acting under your immediate orders, to grant foreigners permission to accompany American traders to the Mississippi, for the purpose of aiding those citizens in their commerce with the Indians on that stream; and refusing to recognize any other authority to trade in that country than the licenses emanating from the Governors of the Missouri and Illinois territories, he seized and sent down to St. Louis, in charge of Lieutenant Blair and a Sergeant's guard, two boats belonging to the American Fur Company, which were under the command of Russell Farnham and Daniel Darling, both natural born citizens of the United States." The American Fur Company was not accustomed to permit infringements of its rights by any government official, no matter how high. Suit was promptly brought against Colonel Chambers, and after litigation running through four years, was decided in favor of the company.⁴ Colonel Thomas H. Benton was counsel for the American Fur Company in this case. Crooks said in the letter quoted in the accompanying footnote that the verdict was especially gratifying to him, not on account of the award, but because it exposed the unreasonable persecution to which the company had been subjected by the St. Louis parties.

The extent to which this persecution was carried may be inferred from the following remarks contained in a letter from Crooks to Nicholas Bolevin at Prairie du Chien dated at Michilimackinac August 9, 1818: "A species of civil war has already been too long waged by the St. Louis interests against those of the Lakes. Our rights to the Indian trade are precisely the same, and surely the men of Mackinaw are entitled to equal protection and advantage with

⁴"The suit with Colonel Chambers for the seizure of Farnham's boats in 1817 was brought to a close at the end of last October, when we obtained a verdict for \$5,000 damages. The Colonel's 'bar'l' being very good, we are likely to recover the amount awarded to us." Letter from Crooks to Stuart, February 8, 1823.

those of the Illinois country. . . . We ask nothing for ourselves, from either the civil or military authorities of the country, which we would for a moment wish to be withheld from the others. We are fully entitled to equal privileges with our opponents, and we can never consent to have them abridged or in any manner impaired."

Still further in evidence of the same bitter feeling against the American Fur Company are the following instructions to Farnham when he was about to start on one of his expeditions to the Mississippi: "You must not listen to the thousand stories and perhaps threats you will hear, for such things will be attempted with a view to checking your activity and enterprise. . . . Be extremely cautious in giving vent to the hard things you may and will feel inclined to say of some people you will have to deal with in the course of your absence from this place; for, be assured, every word affecting these great men will be treasured up against you. And beware of others who will try to insinuate themselves into your confidence the better to betray you."

The American Fur Company meanwhile used its great influence at Washington to remove the legal difficulties of the situation and eventually succeeded. In a letter to Farnham written in New York March 17, 1819, Crooks stated that the War Department had at last cleared up the construction of the law in regard to the introduction of foreigners and the territorial extent of licenses and that the St. Louis officials had been directed to recognize the validity of the licenses of the Mackinaw traders. "You may ascend the Missouri with your Mackinaw men," he writes, "in perfect confidence. Governor Clark has the order about respecting your licenses and so has Colonel Chambers. I met with Mr. Benjamin O'Fallon in Washington. He is appointed agent for the Missouri, and is, I believe, convinced that all the reports so industriously circulated about Mr. Astor and his agents, which created such unheard-of prejudices against us, and did us so much injury with the officers, were invented and propagated by people who feared

us, and labored to drive us by this means from the country. . . . On the whole we have now reason to believe that this reign of persecution is, if not at an end, at least very nearly so. . . . There is nothing to prevent your going into the Missouri now with your Canadians.”⁵

⁵Farnham's first essays up the Missouri river were only as far as to the mouth of Grand river, where he left the Missouri to visit the Sac Indians. Nevertheless, to him belongs the credit of being the first trader in the employ of the American Fur Company to carry the business of that company into the valley of the Missouri.

Russell Farnham was a typical frontiersman of the better class. He first comes to our notice as a clerk in the Pacific Fur Company, and one of the Astorians who sailed in the *Tonquin*. He was a “Green Mountain Boy” of great energy, pluck, and perseverance. His career at Astoria was full of adventure. He was one of a party who pursued and captured a number of deserters in November, 1811. He was in the Indian fight at the Dalles of the Columbia when Reed's tin box was stolen. He helped build the post at Spokane and spent the winter of 1812-13 among the Flatheads. He was executioner of the Indian whom Clarke ordered hung for theft, June 1st, 1813. Upon the downfall of Astoria he sailed with Hunt on the *Pedler*; was landed at Kamchatka; made his way overland to Hamburg, and sailed thence to New York. Crooks, referring to Farnham's life on the Columbia, once said that “he underwent greater privations than any half dozen of us.”

When the American Fur Company began to resume operations after the War of 1812, Farnham entered its service and bore the brunt of the battle during the company's struggle to establish itself on the Missouri. All that is known of him in this new field is given in the present chapter. He did good work and was respected alike by his employers and opponents.

Farnham continued in the service of the company until 1832, when he fell a victim to the cholera and died at St. Louis, October 30th of that year. Crooks thus refers to his death in a letter to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., written in New York November 16th, 1832: “Poor Farnham; he has paid the debt of nature after a life of uncommon activity and endless exposure. Peace to his manes! He was one of the best meaning, but the most sanguine men I almost ever met with. During all the ravages of the pestilence here, and the unexpected rapidity with which some of my friends were hurried to their long account, I never felt anything like the sensation I experienced upon hearing of my honest friend's death, for I did not know he was at St. Louis, and thought him safe in some part of the wilderness.”

It is not to be inferred that during all these years, while Crooks was pushing his operations in the field farther and farther to the westward, Mr. Astor made no attempt to establish a branch house in St. Louis nor others to interest him there. The firm of Berthold, Chouteau and Company had more than once considered the question of purchasing an interest in Mr. Astor's business, but had never come to any definite arrangement. Crooks became tired of dallying in the matter and thus expressed his feeling to Mr. Astor, at that time in Europe, under date of July 27, 1820: "To address Messrs. Berthold and Chouteau on a subject so often canvassed, appears to me more than useless, as their conduct has hitherto betrayed such indecision that small hopes ought to be entertained of their determination now. Perhaps the appearance of David Stone and Company at St. Louis may rouse them from their fancied security and turn their attention seriously this way. Lest that should be the case, and to clear myself from all blame, I shall in a few days write them and request an immediate and specific reply at New York."

The new firm of Stone and Company, to which allusion is here made, was having a career of such rapid prosperity as to alarm the St. Louis traders and even to excite the apprehensions of the American Fur Company itself. What became of its efforts will presently appear, but it will first be of interest to present Mr. Crooks' letter to Berthold and Chouteau which he promised but a moment ago. It is a model in its way and displays to advantage the confidence of the American Fur Company in the ultimate success of its undertaking. After reciting that he had been informed of a recent proposition by Mr. Berthold to Mr. Astor's son to purchase an interest in the American Fur Company, and stating the conditions under which Mr. Astor would be willing to sell, he urged an immediate reply with explicit powers in order that he might convey it to Mr. Astor on his intended visit to that gentleman in Paris. He concluded his letter as follows: "You might perhaps expect me to give an opinion of what the business will hereafter be, but

I neither advise you to join nor dissuade you from the undertaking. You know enough to enable you to decide on what you ought to do, and I can not consent to be blamed should my anticipations and the result prove at variance. For myself and the gentlemen here I am permitted to say, we will with pleasure pursue the same path with you, but if you will not be of our party, we are determined on traveling, as heretofore, by ourselves." ⁶

To this curt ultimatum Berthold and Chouteau did not see fit to accede, and the year's trade went on as before. In the following winter, 1820-21, Crooks went to Europe and entered into arrangements with Astor for the next four years. In the meanwhile, the field of the Missouri grew more tempting than ever, and it became the settled policy of Crooks and Stuart to enter it at the earliest possible moment. In a letter to Mr. Astor, who was still in Europe, dated Michilimackinac, July 29, 1821, Crooks says: "I still intend going to St. Louis with a branch of our concern, and will draw from the outfit usually made from this place those of the Illinois, the lower Mississippi and the Wabash country. The balance of the business can be transacted here advantageously." In pursuance of this policy he wrote to

⁶As further illustrating the confidence of the American Fur Company agents, the following incident may be cited. In the winter of 1818-19 the firm of Cabanne and Company of which Manuel Lisa seems to have been either a partner or principal agent, was dissolved, and both Lisa and one Dennis Julien applied to Mr. Crooks for an outfit of goods, apparently with the intention of embarking in independent enterprises. Although it is not to be supposed that the American Fur Company was unable to comply with these requests, or that it would have been unwilling in ordinary circumstances to do so, Crooks now viewed the matter in a different light. He was willing to forego the advantages of this temporary trade rather than place himself under further obligations to the St. Louis traders, or do anything which might interfere with him when the proper opportunity arrived to seize upon the Missouri trade. He therefore replied adroitly that "it is now too late to procure an additional supply from abroad. Nothing proper for your purpose can be procured here, with the exceptions of some articles of minor importance, and it will consequently be out of my power to meet your wishes."

Samuel Abbott, who was managing the company's business at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi, under date of October 25, 1821: "Unless it is absolutely necessary for you to remain at Prairie du Chien it is our wish that you proceed this fall to St. Louis, there to remain until you obtain a *complete* list of the goods usually found in the retail establishments at that place. Ascertain everything that may be of advantage to us, and, as soon thereafter as may be convenient to yourself, pursue your journey to New York. . . . The state of the fur trade generally, and that of the Missouri particularly, will be very desirable, more especially when coupled with the resources of the individuals who are engaged in the business, as also their standing with the world."

On the 30th of November, 1821, Crooks thus wrote to Mr. Astor: "Preliminary arrangements are made for prosecuting the trade of St. Louis and the Missouri next season. Berthold and Chouteau, with all their advantages, have suffered the firm of Stone & Co. to get the better of them more effectually than could have been believed, and as there is no injunction to the contrary, we may as well come in for a share of the business. . . . You now do no business with them worth attending to,⁷ and any scruples we have heretofore entertained in regard to embarking

⁷This refers to Mr. Astor's relations with certain traders in St. Louis which had in part deterred him from entering the field against them. It is greatly to the credit of Mr. Astor that he never stooped to the petty competition which was such a constant feature of the fur trade in those years. He stood on higher ground in those matters than his agents ever did, possibly because he was more removed from the field of actual operations. He was supplying with goods certain St. Louis firms whose trade lay up the Missouri, and he therefore scrupulously avoided entering the same field of operations with them. Thus, in a letter to Farnham dated December 28, 1818, Crooks expresses regret that Farnham had entered the country of the Sac Indians by the route of the Missouri and Grand rivers, instead of by the Mississippi and the Des Moines; "for," said he, "although no agreement exists between us and Messrs. Cabanne & Company, to prevent our going into that river or they into the Mississippi, still, as Mr. Astor supplies their goods, they partly calculated on our not opposing them."

in their portion of the trade, ought not to be indulged in any longer. Besides, their apathy or bad management in opposing Stone begins to enlarge *his* views, and has already tempted him to commence a competition with our outposts on the lower Mississippi; so that, independent of other considerations, self defense will lead us into the field against him. I shall not, however, for the first year attempt much. My intention is merely to supply our lower Mississippi and Illinois river outfits from St. Louis, and tamper with the Missouri traders on a moderate scale, in order to secure them for the following year. . . . Without being very sanguine, I feel so favorably toward the undertaking as to make me enter it with great confidence of success."

On the 2nd of July, 1821, the British Parliament passed an act which virtually excluded American traders from Canadian territory. The American Fur Company accordingly withdrew its outposts from the region to the east of Lake Huron, but promptly made a counter move along the frontier from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods by establishing three posts there in competition with the Hudson Bay Company.

In the winter of 1821-22 the American Fur Company made a very important move in securing the abolition by Congress of the United States factories for trading with the Indians. This achievement, which has been fully considered in another place, removed government competition in the trade, and left the company with a free hand to fight its battles with the private traders.

In the spring of 1822 Crooks prepared to put his ideas into effect by opening up an establishment at St. Louis. He wrote to Astor, April 23, 1822: "I regret beyond measure that our fastidiousness about interfering with our St. Louis friends induced us to postpone until the present time any attempt to participate in the Missouri trade." And later in the same letter he adds: "Mr. Samuel Abbott goes to St. Louis to remain in charge of our concerns there." In a letter from Crooks to Stuart of April 10, 1822, occurs the

first mention that has fallen under our observation of the use of the name *Western Department* as applied to the St. Louis interests of the American Fur Company.

It was therefore in the year 1822 (not 1819, as has been generally given by historians) that the American Fur Company established its Western Department at St. Louis, and gave to its previous field of operations the name of the Northern Department. Samuel Abbott was the first person in charge of the new business at St. Louis, while Robert Stuart remained at Michilimackinac. The Western Department was confined to the Missouri and the lower posts on the Mississippi and the Illinois. With the Northern Department, which embraced the region of the Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi, we shall have nothing to do farther except as it may incidentally fall in our way.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AMERICAN FUR COMPANY.

THE UPPER MISSOURI OUTFIT.

Consolidation with Stone, Bostwick and Company—Arrangement with the St. Louis traders—Sketch of the Columbia Fur Company—Rivalry with the American Fur Company—Union with American Fur Company—Importance of this union—Movement toward the upper river—Establishment of Fort Union—Commencement of the mountain trade—Henry Vanderburgh—Attempt to open a trade with the Blackfeet—The mission of Berger—Blackfeet visit Fort Union—A trader sent to the Blackfeet—Treaty of peace between the Blackfeet and the Assiniboines—Establishment of Fort Piegan—Successful trade at this post—Mitchell builds Fort McKenzie—Tulloch builds Fort Cass on the Yellowstone—Upper country all occupied by end of 1832—Business changes—Proposition to introduce steamboats in the trade—The *Yellowstone* built—Voyages of 1831 and 1832—Their importance in the history of the Missouri—Impression upon the Indians—British influence on the Upper Missouri—History of the Astor medals.

THE American Fur Company was thus finally established at St. Louis in spite of the opposition of the St. Louis traders. It was there without connection or dependence upon any of them. But it would still require a great deal of adroit management and much hard work before its hold on the Missouri trade could be made secure. There was the solid opposition of the local traders to contend with, and there had lately arisen the formidable concern of David Stone and Company, or, as it was also called, Stone, Bostwick and Company. Finally a Boston company, whose name is omitted from the correspondence, had recently entered the field with a great show of strength. So many houses could not all prosper on the amount of business at

that time in sight, and it was clear that there must be a combination of interests by which some of the companies would survive and others be forced from the field.

The first step toward a consolidation is announced in a letter from Crooks to Stuart dated New York, February 8, 1823. It says, among other things, that "Messrs. Stone, Bostwick and Company have been admitted into the American Fur Company to commence the 1st of April next and continue three and one-half years, which is six months longer than our agreement with Mr. Astor.¹ . . . For the present, you will take charge of the Detroit Department, and Mr. Bostwick will manage at St. Louis, where I will assist him next summer." Abbott was also to operate with Bostwick in St. Louis. This was welcome news to Stuart, who wrote to David Stone, May 19, 1823: "Permit me to welcome you as a member of the American Fur Company. I think you have all acted wisely; but if the junction had been formed five years ago, there would have been cause for mutual congratulation."

The arrangement with Stone, Bostwick and Company ran through the agreed three and one-half years, and was not renewed, but instead the management of the affairs of the Western Department was placed in the hands of Bernard Pratte and Company under an agreement which was to continue in force for a period of four years.² Thus, at the very period when General Ashley's remarkable achievements were turning the heads of the St. Louis traders, the American Fur Company formed its first alliance with any of the old St. Louis houses. Bernard Pratte and Company

¹ Crooks and Stuart's arrangements thus continued until the spring of 1826, while the agreement with Stone, Bostwick and Company ran until the fall of that year.

With the letter next below the Mackinaw record closes and the next data upon the subject are found in the Chouteau papers of St. Louis.

² "Nous sommes fondés sur ½ dans les profits où perts des opérations de traite pour le Mississipi depuis le Prairie du Chien et de tout le Missouri et de ses dépendences." Bernard Pratte and Company to J. P. Cabanne, January 9, 1827.

included some of the strongest of the traders, among them one or more of the Chouteaus. It is only to be regretted that this inevitable consummation did not take place in 1809 instead of 1827.

Scarcely had the American Fur Company closed this important arrangement when it was compelled to give its attention to a powerful opposition which had grown up in the field of its operations. This was the Columbia Fur Company, an organization only five years old, which had extended its trade through the entire region of the headwaters of the Mississippi as far east as the Great Lakes and as far west as the Missouri. The history of this company is somewhat obscure, but the more important facts are known. Its founder was Joseph Renville, an old British trader who later served as an officer during the War of 1812. After the war he retired on the half pay of a captain of the line, and resumed his former occupation. Wishing to return to his post on the Red River of the North within the territory of the United States, but not being permitted to retain his pay if he left British territory, he gave up his pension and went back to his post. When the amalgamation of the Northwest and Hudson Bay Companies took place in 1821, and threw out of service many of the former employes of these companies, Renville invited several of the most experienced to join him in a new company. The names of those who accepted this proposal were Kenneth McKenzie and William Laidlaw. The ablest of these associates was Kenneth McKenzie, who in a few years rose to the presidency of the new company. As the laws of the United States forbade foreigners to engage in the fur trade within its boundaries on their own account, the organization was legalized by bringing in certain citizens of the United States, among them Daniel Lamont, and placing it under their name. The legal title of the firm was Tilton and Company, but the name by which it was always known was the Columbia Fur Company. Whether this name was given in token of the ambitious schemes of the new company and their

purpose to carry their trade to the Pacific, does not appear.

The capital of the Columbia Fur Company was not large, but the partners were all bold, experienced, and enterprising men. They rapidly extended their trade over a wide tract of country. Their principal establishment was at Lake Traverse, almost exactly on the divide between two important rivers — the St. Peter's, a large tributary of the Mississippi, and the Red River of the North. Another post was at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi, and a third as far east as Green Bay on the western shore of Lake Michigan. The most important outposts, however, were on the Missouri river. In 1823³ James Kipp and a Mr. Tilton, doubtless of the firm of Tilton and Company, visited the Mandans, and then built a post on the south side of the Missouri above the site where Fort Clark was built. Tilton was the first trader in charge. He and Kipp had a hard time of it at the new post, for the Aricaras, immediately after Colonel Leavenworth's attack on their villages, had moved up the river and had settled down opposite the Mandans. Far from being humbled by their experiences at the hands of Colonel Leavenworth, they were more vicious and troublesome than ever, and practically held the new post in a state of siege. Tilton and Kipp were forced to abandon it before winter set in. They built a house in the Mandan village, where they conducted their trade until 1827. The necessary supplies were brought in part from Fort Traverse, and in part by keelboat from St. Louis.

The most important of this company's posts on the Missouri was just above the mouth of the Teton river, or the Little Missouri, as it was then called. It bore the name of Fort Tecumseh. The American Fur Company also had a post here, but what the name was is not known. Still farther down was Fort Lookout, and close by it the Ameri-

³ This would seem to be the correct date. Maximilian says it was in 1822, but adds that it was in the year of the Leavenworth campaign against the Aricaras, which was in 1823. Others of Maximilian's dates in this connection are back one year.

can Fur Company post, Kiowa. Below this were posts at the mouth of the Niobrara, James, and Vermilion rivers, while the lowest establishment on the river was at Council Bluffs. The American Fur Company likewise had posts all along this stretch of river, but none so high as the Mandans. By the close of the year 1826, when Bernard Pratte and Company assumed the agency of the Western Department, the American and Columbia Fur Companies were in active competition with each other through the Sioux and Omaha country. Both companies outfitted in St. Louis, and throughout the field did business along the same lines. The Columbia Fur Company had grown too strong and possessed too much ability to be put down by competition, and it became necessary for the American Fur Company to do something else to rid itself of an opposition which, according to Crooks, did their "business in those countries an annual injury of ten thousand dollars at least."

Proposals were therefore made for a union of the two companies and negotiations to this end were completed about July, 1827.⁴ The terms of the new arrangement were advantageous to all concerned, and were an important step on the part of the American Fur Company toward adjusting its business to the new situation upon which it had entered. The Columbia Fur Company withdrew altogether from the region of the Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi, which thus reverted to the Northern Department without opposition. On the Missouri a sub-department was created including all the valley above the mouth of the Big Sioux, and the Columbia Fur Company took charge of this department almost without change of organization. The partners of the retiring company became partners or proprietors of this sub-department, and McKenzie, Laidlaw, and Lamont

⁴ Chouteau to Russell Farnham, July 11, 1827: "I have at last concluded the arrangement [of consolidation] with the Columbia Fur Company."

Numerous other references to this event are found in the correspondence of the summer of 1827.

conducted the affairs of the upper Missouri quite as independently as if they had remained a separate company.

Mr. Crooks in his instructions to P. D. Papin, whom he sent up the river to appraise with Mr. McKenzie the property of the Columbia Fur Company, gave him the following directions: "You will deliver to Mr. McKenzie or his agent the whole of our property at the different posts, with all the books and papers appertaining thereto, and you will direct our people to obey him in all things as they would Bernard Pratte and Company. You will give him all the information you can relative to the property, the condition of our business, the nature and state of the accounts, and the character of our people individually." The arrangement with the American Fur Company was therefore more in the nature of a union than an amalgamation. The name Columbia Fur Company was dropped and in its place arose the unpretentious business style of "Upper Missouri Outfit," or in brief, "U. M. O." In all the trade arrangements for the next twenty years or more this name and division of the river were preserved.⁵

The transfer of property resulting from the union of the two companies was completed by the end of the year 1827. The inventories were turned over at Prairie du Chien October 10; at Council Bluffs October 1; and at Fort Tecumseh December 5. The valuation of the Columbia Fur Company property at the various posts on the Missouri was a little over seventeen thousand dollars. The entire transaction was thus completed and the new arrangement went into full effect with the beginning of the year 1828.

This event was the most important in the history of the Western Department of the American Fur Company for it made that department by far the most powerful trading

⁵ It is an interesting fact that this division of the valley of the Missouri has characterized the history of the river in one respect or another to the present day. In the government control and improvement of the river there are now two districts whose dividing line is at Sioux City, Iowa.

concern on the river. Thereafter the "company" always meant, among the fur traders of the West, the American Fur Company, and all others were mere "opposition" companies. This supremacy it maintained until it went out of business altogether over thirty years afterward.

At the time of the transfer of the Columbia Fur Company, General Ashley had just received the third of his phenomenal collections of beaver skins from beyond the mountains. His successes made a profound impression at St. Louis, and it was the ambition of the American Fur Company to invade those regions from which wealth was being so easily extracted. It was Kenneth McKenzie's desire to enter the mountain business at once and he laid before the management in St. Louis a carefully concerted plan of operations for the season of 1828. But less sanguine councils prevailed. Ashley's performance was regarded as too extraordinary to be capable of general imitation, and the company thought it better to go a little slow and first establish a permanent post at the mouth of the Yellowstone, which would afford a safe and convenient base for the operations of the upper country. McKenzie was selected for this purpose, after Pierre Chouteau, with great gentleness and consideration, had dissuaded him from his cherished mountain enterprise.

In the summer of 1828 accordingly a definite advance toward the sources of the Missouri river was commenced. The first step naturally was to occupy that important situation at the mouth of the Yellowstone to which natural routes of travel converged from all parts of the territory beyond. Here evidently would be the central and principal depot for all the trade of the upper country. It is more than possible that it was this "union at some convenient point above," referred to by McKenzie in discussing the trade situation, which led him to give the name Union to the establishment finally built there. It was about September 15th that he dispatched the keelboat *Otter* from the Mandans to the mouth of the Yellowstone to establish a post

for the Assiniboine trade. The boat arrived "in sufficient time to build a fort and have all necessary preparations made for security."⁶ Who it was that McKenzie sent to do this work is not stated in the correspondence, but it was very likely James Kipp. The date of the beginning of the work was within two weeks of October 1, 1828. This post, the first that the American Fur Company built above the Mandans, was not named Union, as is generally supposed, but Fort Floyd.⁷ "Fort Union" was first applied to a post built in the year 1829, about two hundred miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. The correspondence of the American Fur Company is clear upon this point. But before the close of 1830 the name "Floyd" had been abandoned and "Union" had been permanently settled upon the post at or near the Yellowstone.

While McKenzie was establishing himself upon the upper Missouri, he was keeping his eye upon the rich fields where General Ashley had won his wealth and fame. He took early measures to open up a business in the mountains even if he could not personally attend to it. In the fall of 1828 he sent Etienne Provost to look up the trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company with a view to bringing them in to Fort Floyd. This was no doubt congenial work to Provost, who, as we have seen, had fallen out with Ashley and his associates in the summer of 1826. In the fall of 1828 old Hugh Glass came to Fort Floyd and said that he had been deputed by the free trappers to invite McKenzie to bring goods to a rendezvous designated by them for trade after the spring hunt of 1829. To meet these hunters a party was organized under Henry Vanderburgh, and left St. Louis in April, 1829, with thirty men, twenty-five horses and fifty traps. Not much is known for the next two years of the doings of this intrepid leader except that he plunged at once into the heart of the mountains and was as bold and enterprising as were any of his rivals in the mountain company.

⁶ McKenzie to Chouteau, Fort Tecumseh, December 26, 1828.

⁷ See "Fort Union" in list of trading posts, Appendix F.

One scrap of information shows that he made the acquaintance of the Blackfeet at an early day. In the summer of 1830 he had a hard battle with them in which he was victorious though at the loss of one of his party. He killed a large number of the Indians. It was only two years later that he paid for this victory with his own life.

This was the beginning of the American Fur Company's participation in the fur trade of the Rocky mountains. It dates from the year after the termination of Bernard Pratte and Company's arrangement with General Ashley. It did not prove to be an advantageous branch of the trade, but rather a source of infinite annoyance in the fierce competition which it engendered.⁸

The contract between the American Fur Company and Bernard Pratte and Company by which the latter assumed control of the Western Department was to continue in force for four years. It expired with the outfit for 1829. In like manner the contract between the latter company and Mc-

⁸The following extracts from letters from Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to Kenneth McKenzie will be of interest in this connection. September 28, 1827: "I have the satisfaction to inform you that our mountain expedition in connection with General Ashley has been successful in its trade by closing at once the outfit and fortunate by having reached the settlements in safety with the whole returns; which terminates our arrangements with the General. It therefore becomes necessary to learn from you with the least possible loss of time what is to be done to prosecute the business in the Rocky mountains, which is intended to be carried on through the medium of your Upper Missouri Outfit."

April 25, 1828: "I have no objection to your going with the first expedition, because I consider it very important, not only on account of the hunt, but even more for the purpose of opening relations with the hunting parties, whether of Ashley, or Pilcher, or whatever trader. For three years these enterprises have succeeded well with General Ashley, but with him alone. Many others, and even he before this time, have met with great disasters. I believe that there is a great deal to gain if such an expedition succeeds, but there is also great risk to run. One of the principal dangers is loss of horses at the hands of the Indians. It is necessary to be prudent, firm, and especially to exact obedience from the engagés, who are generally very insubordinate. The least negligence in the care of the horses may entail the ruin of the party." Other considerations prevailed, as we have seen, and McKenzie did not go to the mountains.

Kenzie, Laidlaw and Lamont, as agents of the Upper Missouri Outfit, expired with the equipment for the year 1830. Both of these contracts were renewed — the first on the 22nd of March, 1830, and the second in August of that year. The renewals in both cases were for four years. The firm of Bernard Pratte and Company included Bernard Pratte, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., John P. Cabanne, and B. Berthold. The terms of the new agreement were practically the same as the old. The arrangement between the Western Department and the Upper Missouri Outfit was also the same as before, except that McKenzie was given a higher salary.⁹

McKenzie entered upon the second period of his work on the upper Missouri with all the energy of a strong nature and a full realization of his magnificent opportunities. Being now secure in his position at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and having made a definite beginning in the mountain trade, he turned his attention toward the occupation of more advanced territory. Hitherto the country of the Blackfeet had not been successfully occupied by any company. The Missouri Fur Company was twice driven out with great loss while Ashley and Henry in 1822 and 1823 met with a similar experience. Even as late as 1830 no intercourse of any kind had been opened up with these Indians and they had no means of knowing the views of American traders. They were under the influence of British traders, so far as they were under any influence from without, and this was hostile to the Americans. The prospect of gaining a foothold in their country was therefore anything but reassuring. But as the tributaries of the upper Missouri were known to be rich in beaver it was scarcely to be expected that a man of

⁹ It seems that McKenzie was paid a salary besides his share in the business. The renewal of the contract above referred to is mentioned in a letter from Chouteau to W. B. Astor, August 23, 1830, in which Mr. Chouteau says: "The company has renewed the contract with McKenzie, Laidlaw, and Lamont for four years more, upon existing conditions, except that the equipment of the U. M. O. is to pay \$2,000 annually to Mr. McKenzie instead of \$1,500, as heretofore."

McKenzie's ambitious temperament would fail to find some means of drawing their wealth in his own direction.

It happened that the desired opportunity of opening communication with the Blackfeet came about in quite an unexpected way. McKenzie, who had been down the river in the summer of 1830, returned to Fort Union in the fall. He found there an old trapper by the name of Berger, who had long served with the Hudson Bay Company at their post nearest the Blackfoot country. Berger understood the Blackfoot language perfectly, was well acquainted with the tribal characteristics, and knew many of the Indians individually. How he happened to come to Fort Union and enter the service of the American Fur Company is not known, but there he was, and a more useful individual to McKenzie's purpose he could not have found in the entire West. McKenzie promptly approached him with a proposal that he should visit the Blackfeet and open negotiations with them. It was a dangerous mission, and was considered almost a forlorn hope by the people at Fort Union, but Berger consented to try it.¹⁰

Berger set out from Fort Union in the fall and traveled some four weeks before he saw any Indians. The party carried a flag unfurled so that the Indians might know at a distance that they were white men. They finally found a large village on the Marias river, some distance above the mouth. At the sight of it the little party were so terror-stricken that they wanted to turn back, but Berger persisted in the purpose of his mission, and the men followed his lead, scarcely expecting to be alive for another hour. When they were discovered, a number of mounted Indians started for

¹⁰ There are several accounts of this expedition, notably those given by Charles Larpenteur in *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, pp. 111-116; and by James Stuart in contributions to *Montana Historical Society*, Vol. I., p. 84. These accounts differ widely in details, as all narratives based upon tradition are liable to. But the essential facts have recently come to light in the American Fur Company correspondence herewith presented, so that the account here given may be considered as being close to the facts as they occurred.

them at full speed. Berger halted his party and himself advanced with his flag. The Indians paused and Berger called out his name. They recognized it, there was a rush to shake hands, and then the little party were welcomed to the village, where, to their great joy, they were received in the most hospitable manner. How long they remained is not known, but Berger finally succeeded in inducing a party of about forty, including several chiefs, to accompany him to Fort Union. The route was a long one, and on the way the Indians began to complain of the distance. Berger was put to his wit's end to prevent their turning back. Finally, when within a day's march from the post, tradition says, the Indians concluded to stop. Berger besought them to go on one day more and told them that if they did not reach the fort in that time he would give them his scalp and all his horses. This guaranty of good faith induced them to keep on, and sure enough, about 3 P. M. the next day they passed over a river bluff and beheld in the valley below the fort, just as Berger had told them. It was a great feat that Berger had accomplished, and McKenzie was highly gratified at its successful outcome.

The party reached Fort Union before the end of the year 1831. McKenzie had a conference with the chiefs, and it goes without saying that that astute leader left no stone unturned to create a favorable impression. The Indians professed great satisfaction at the prospect of having a trading post near their village, and as an earnest of his purpose to establish one there during the following summer, McKenzie sent a trader and a few men to trade with them during the winter. He completed this stroke of good fortune during the following summer by bringing about a treaty of peace and friendship between the Blackfeet and the Assiniboines which promised protection to the trade throughout this region. The treaty was consummated on the 29th day of November, 1831.¹¹

¹¹ Following is McKenzie's account of Berger's successful visit, as condensed in a letter to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., dated at Fort Tecum-

In accordance with this promise to the Blackfeet McKenzie dispatched an expedition up the river in the fall of 1831. It consisted of twenty-five men under James Kipp, and left Fort Union on the 25th of August. The progress was very slow owing to low water, and the expedition did not pass the mouth of the Muscleshell until September 16th. In one place they only made eight miles in eleven days. They probably arrived at the mouth of the Marias and commenced their fort about the 15th of October.

The day before they reached their destination a trader of the Hudson Bay Company by the name of Fisher approached within a day's march and sent a message to the Piegans with a flattering offer if they would bring their trade to the British posts. He told them that the chiefs should all be

seh, January 7, 1831: "On my arrival at Fort Union last fall I fortunately found a Blackfoot interpreter, Berger, and by this means have been enabled to make those Indians acquainted with my views regarding them. I sent him with four or five men to their village, where they were kindly received and well treated. On their return to the fort they were accompanied by some of the principal chiefs. They expressed great satisfaction and pleasure at having a post at their village, which I promised and assured them that they should have this fall; and in order to strengthen my promise I have sent a clerk, with four or five men, to them to trade what they may have. It is impossible to say what may be the result of this enterprise, but I am very sanguine in my expectations."

The treaty of peace which McKenzie concluded with the Blackfeet in the summer of 1831, and which all narratives of these events mention, is a singular document. It is thus referred to in a letter from McKenzie to Chouteau, written at Fort Union December 11, 1831: "I have lately negotiated a treaty of peace between the Assiniboine and Blackfoot Indians, which I expect will be ratified. Exchange of tobacco has been made and all requisite ceremonies observed. If firm and durable it will be of great importance to this district."

Maximilian has preserved to us a copy of this treaty, which is worthy of reproduction for its original and grandiloquent phraseology: "We send greeting to all mankind! Be it known unto all nations that the most ancient, most illustrious, and most numerous tribes of the redskins, lords of the soil from the banks of the great waters unto the tops of the mountains, upon which the heavens rest, have entered into a solemn league and covenant to make, preserve and

well dressed, all their wants supplied, and that they should be given better prices for their furs than the Americans, who were very poor, would give. Fortunately, McKenzie had a trader present among the Piegans at that time, the same whom he had sent among them some months before, and he proved quite as influential as "the smooth-tongued Englishman." The Piegans seemed from the start to be warmly attached to the Americans. It was a fortunate circumstance for they were the beaver hunters of their nation. They were at this time, says McKenzie, very jealous of their rights, and would not permit white men to set a trap in their country. This, however, far from being a disadvantage, was quite the reverse, for the company was spared all the trouble and loss attendant upon trapping expeditions.

The site selected by Kipp for the post was immediately in cherish a firm and lasting peace, that so long as the water runs, or the grass grows, they may hail each other as brethren, and smoke the calumet in friendship and security.

"On the vigil of St. Andrew in the year 1831, the powerful and distinguished nation of the Blackfeet, Piegan, and Blood Indians by their ambassadors appeared at Fort Union near the spot where the Yellowstone river unites its current with the Missouri, and in the council chamber of the Governor, Kenneth McKenzie, and the principal chief of the Assiniboine nation, the Man-that-Holds-the-Knife, attended by his chiefs of council, le Bechu, le Borgne, the Sparrow, the Bear's Arm, La Terre qui Tremble, and l'Enfant de Médecin, when, conforming to all ancient customs and ceremonies, and observing the due mystical signs enjoined by the great medicine lodges, a treaty of peace and friendship was entered into by the said high contracting parties, and is testified by their hands and seals hereunto annexed, hereafter and forever to live as brethren of one large, united, and happy family; and may the Great Spirit who watcheth over us all approve our conduct and teach us to love one another.

"Done, executed, ratified, and confirmed at Fort Union on the day and year first within written, in the presence of Jas. Archdale Hamilton."

The treaty is signed by a number of Assiniboine chiefs and by McKenzie on "behalf of the Piegans and Blackfeet." The ratification which McKenzie speaks of in his letter above doubtless refers to the Blackfeet, who were evidently absent, from the fact that McKenzie signed for them.

the angle between the Marias and the Missouri. When he arrived no Indians were present, but on the following day they appeared in great numbers. Kipp requested them to withdraw while he was constructing the post, telling them that if they would return in seventy-five days he would be ready to receive them. They agreed to do this. Promptly upon the expiration of the time fixed they appeared again and were astonished to find the fort all completed and ready for the trade.¹² During the first ten days after the post was built there were traded, according to McKenzie, two thousand four hundred beaver skins with the prospect of bringing the number up to four thousand before the winter was over.

The British, meanwhile, alarmed at the success of the Americans, are said to have instigated the Blood Indians to attempt the reduction of the post. The attack occurred in the winter time. Kipp had sufficient warning to lay in a stock of ice, for he had plenty of everything except water, and had no fear of a siege. The Indians beleaguered the post for some time, but finally withdrew. Kipp then turned his own weapons of war — the war of the traders — upon the Indians, and poured into them incessant charges of alcohol until the whole band was utterly vanquished and surrendered body and soul to the incomparable trader. Never had the English treated them so bountifully. They brought all their furs to the American post and before spring a fine lot had been collected.

In the spring of 1832 it became necessary for Kipp to take his furs to Fort Union. It was the strong desire of the Indians that the fort should be kept open during the summer, but Kipp's men refused to remain if he left. They accordingly abandoned the post and the Indians burned it soon after.¹³

¹² This post was very appropriately named Fort Piegan.

¹³ Some of the statements contained in this account of the founding of Fort Piegan were related by Kipp himself to Lieutenant J. H. Bradley, whose manuscript is now in the possession of the Montana His-

In the summer of 1832 David D. Mitchell was sent to take charge of affairs at the mouth of the Marias. Before he had reached the Muscleshell the keelboat *Flora*, carrying, it was said, thirty thousand dollars' worth of goods, was lost. It was swept from its moorings during the night by a storm, and was blown against a sand bar, where it sank. Two men were drowned. All the presents which McKenzie was sending to the Blackfeet were also lost. A large number of these Indians were accompanying the party, and were very angry, for they suspected that the destruction of the boat was by design. Mitchell came very near having serious trouble. He must have gone back to Union for a new outfit, but there is no record of his having done so.

When Mitchell arrived at Fort Piegan he found it burned down, and not liking the situation, he moved up the river six miles and selected a site on the left or north bank of the river in what is now known as Brulé bottom. The erection of the new post at this point was one of the thrilling episodes of the fur trade. There were several thousand Indians present, who had assembled from all quarters. The whites, during the building of the fort, lived on their keelboat. They worked like beavers, for the peril of the situation was apparent to all. Many of the Indians were actually hostile, and were ready for desperate measures. The entire party of whites could easily have been destroyed. But the men kept working away, while Mitchell maintained amicable relations. On one occasion it seemed as if trouble could not be avoided, but Mitchell's firmness and tact saved the party. As soon as the stockade was erected the men felt safe, and the Indians in large part withdrew soon after. This post was named Fort McKenzie, in honor of the able trader who ruled the country from Fort Union. Its successful completion assured a permanent foothold in the Blackfoot country, and it continued to be occupied until nearly the close of the period embraced in this work.

torical Society. Unfortunately Kipp was too intent upon warping the facts to his own glorification to give one that confidence in his statements that could be desired.

As soon as the success of the Blackfoot establishment was assured McKenzie turned his attention to the Crows. He already had itinerant traders among them, but the Indians wanted a post. In the same letter (December 11, 1831) in which he announced to the St. Louis management that Kipp had succeeded in his enterprise at the mouth of the Marias he said: "I intend to build a fort next summer on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Bighorn for the Crows, and for many years some straggling white hunters will stay in the Crow country from whom we may expect a little beaver." This purpose was carried out the following year. Mr. Chouteau, who visited Union in June, 1832, on the steamboat *Yellowstone*, wrote to Mr. W. B. Astor on his return that McKenzie was, at the time of his visit at the fort, "preparing an outfit for the Yellowstone in order to establish a post at the mouth of the Bighorn for the trade of the Crows and the surrounding tribes, and to supply their mountain hunters." Samuel Tulloch was sent in charge of this work. The post was built in the fall of 1832, and was called Fort Cass.

By this time the field of the upper Missouri was as fully occupied as it ever came to be by the American Fur Company. There were three primary bases of operations — Fort Union at the confluence of the Missouri and the Yellowstone; Fort McKenzie on the Missouri near the mouth of the Marias, and Fort Cass on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Bighorn. The company at one time contemplated building a post at the Three Forks, but this was never done, for the subsequent developments of the trade never required any increase in the number of these establishments. It was found that the resources of this remote country could be better exploited by the mountain trade, which was by this time thoroughly organized.

The successful work of McKenzie, by which, in the space of five years he had practically covered the whole field, and had firmly established his company in a region which had so far baffled the efforts of all traders to penetrate. is

ample proof of his great executive ability. Among the schemes which he originated for the more vigorous conduct of the business was the introduction of the steamboat in the trade. As this event marks the advent of one of the most flourishing businesses and one of the most remarkable features in the frontier development of the West, it is of much historic interest. Steamboats had been used to a limited extent on the lower river for the previous decade. The first boat had entered the Missouri in 1819, and in the same year the *Western Engineer* had reached Council Bluffs. But before 1830 scarcely any steamboat business was done above the mouth of the Kansas river, and but very little below. McKenzie's scheme of taking a steamboat to the mouth of the Yellowstone river was therefore very much in the nature of an experiment, and the majority of the business men of St. Louis doubted its success. But McKenzie was the sort of man to grapple with new and hazardous enterprises, and was not afraid to undertake a measure simply because it had not been tried before. He succeeded in convincing the management at St. Louis of the practicability of the project, and it was decided to undertake it.¹⁴

The plan of this new enterprise was outlined in great detail by Mr. Chouteau in a letter to the house in New York written on the 30th of August, 1830. He recounted the great losses and delays, as well as the expense for men, attendant upon keelboat traffic. He thought that a small steamboat, such as could be built for about seven thousand dollars, could start up the Missouri in April and return with the proceeds of the trade by the end of June. The men required would be fewer, and barges could be retained for the trade higher up, or could return to St. Louis late in the season with furs. They would also be available in case of

¹⁴ This decision was reached in the month of August, 1830, after a full conference with McKenzie, who arrived at St. Louis from the interior August 5. In a letter dated August 31, 1830, Mr. Chouteau says: "Nous avons en contemplation de faire bâtir un petit steamboat dans le cours de l'hiver pour le faire monter de bon printemps avec les marchandises pour la traite suivante."

accidents to the steamboats. The greatest difficulty to be apprehended was from the breakage of machinery so far away from shops, and this it was hoped to overcome by taking along spare parts together with a complete blacksmith outfit. On the whole the experiment was considered worth trying, and steps were taken accordingly. The boat was contracted for in October, 1830, to be delivered on the 1st of April following. It was built in Louisville, Kentucky, and was christened the *Yellowstone*.

The boat was completed on time, brought to St. Louis, loaded with the first fur trade cargo that any steamboat ever attempted to take to the far upper rivers, and left St. Louis on the 16th of April, 1831.¹⁵ Captain B. Young was master of the boat, while its principal passenger was Pierre Chouteau, Jr., who made the trip for the double purpose of judging of the merits of the steamboat experiment, and of studying the situation of the trade at the various posts. The boat proceeded with fair progress until it passed the mouth of the Niobrara, about the 31st of May. Just above this point it was stopped by low water and was delayed for a considerable time. This delay was a great annoyance to Mr. Chouteau. Impatiently he waited day by day for a rise in the river. In his anxiety he would go ashore every day, and pace up and down a high river bluff watching the weather and longing for more water. The place has ever since been known as Chouteau's Bluffs. He did not, however, wait supinely for the weather, but sent for some boats from Fort Tecumseh to act as lighters. By the aid of these the steamboat was able to proceed, and arrived at the fort on the 19th of June, 1831.¹⁶ That part of the trip which lay above Council Bluffs was traversed on this voyage for the first time by steamboats.

¹⁵ "Le steamboat *Yellowstone* a laissé le port le 16 à midi." B. Pratte & Co. to W. B. Astor, April 19, 1831.

¹⁶ Chouteau to W. B. Astor, August 17, 1831: "Ce ne fut donc qu'à la faveur de trois berges, que j'envoyai chercher au Petit Missouri, et qui reçurent une grande partie de la charge, qu'il m'a été possible de me rendre avec le bateau le 19 Juin au Fort Tecumseh."

No attempt was made to go beyond Fort Tecumseh. After the business at this post was transacted the boat started for St. Louis. She made the return journey in safety and arrived in St. Louis on the 15th day of July, "with a full cargo of buffalo robes, furs, and peltries, besides ten thousand pounds of buffalo tongues." Mr. Chouteau returned convinced of the feasibility of using steamboats in his trade, and it was decided to repeat the experiment the following year.

In several respects the voyage of the *Yellowstone* in 1832 has been a landmark in the history of the West. It demonstrated the practicability of navigating the Missouri by steam as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone with a strong probability that boats could go on to the Blackfoot country. Among the passengers was the artist, Catlin, whose works have given added celebrity to the voyage. The boat left St. Louis March 26, 1832. It made extremely slow progress, and did not reach Fort Tecumseh until the 31st of May. Here a delay of six days occurred during which the new fort, built to replace Fort Tecumseh, was christened Fort Pierre, in honor of the distinguished trader, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., who was a passenger on the boat.

Leaving Fort Pierre on the 5th of June, the boat went on to Fort Union. The date of its arrival is uncertain. That given by Catlin, June 26th, is wrong, for the boat was back at Fort Pierre on the 24th. The date was about June 17th. On the return journey the *Yellowstone* left Fort Pierre on the 25th of June and reached St. Louis July 7th. Its downward trip had averaged one hundred miles per day.

This noted voyage gave great satisfaction to the company. It completed the second step in reaching the head of navigation on the Missouri by steam, the first having been accomplished from St. Louis to Council Bluffs in 1819, and the third from Fort Union to Fort Benton in 1859. From 1832 on, the Missouri river steamboat was a constant and indis-

pensible feature of frontier life in every department until the railroad at last destroyed its usefulness.

The interest created by the voyage of the *Yellowstone* extended not only over the United States, but to Europe as well. Writing from New York, November 16, 1832, Ramsay Crooks thus addressed Mr. Chouteau upon the subject: "I congratulate you most cordially on your perseverance and ultimate success in reaching the Yellowstone by *steam*, and the future historian of the Missouri will preserve for you the honorable and enviable distinction of having accomplished an object of immense importance, by exhibiting the practicability of conquering the obstructions of the Missouri considered till almost the present day insurmountable to steamboats even among those best acquainted with their capabilities. You have brought the Falls of the Missouri as near, comparatively, as was the River Platte in my younger days." And Mr. Astor, writing from Bellevue, France, said to Mr. Chouteau: "Your voyage in the *Yellowstone* attracted much attention in Europe, and has been noted in all the papers here."

It is needless to say that the appearance of this wonderful craft made a profound impression upon the Indians. Its power against the current, as if moved by some supernatural agency, excited the keenest astonishment, and even aroused a feeling of terror. One good effect was to increase their respect for Americans. The *Missouri Republican*, commenting upon the voyage, said: "Many of the Indians who had been in the habit of trading with the Hudson Bay Company, declared that the company could no longer compete with the Americans, and concluded thereafter to bring all their skins to the latter; and said that the British might turn out their dogs and burn their sledges, as they would no longer be useful while the *Fire Boat* walked on the waters."

Reference has already been made to a subject which had an importance among the Missouri traders all out of proportion to the information which they have left concerning it. From the date of the Lewis and Clark expedition to the

close of the period of this work the traders were always complaining of the British. Particularly in the earlier years of the American Fur Company's business along the boundary these complaints were loud and incessant. There was probably something in them, but how much it is impossible to say, for they were couched in general terms, and rarely gave any specific facts to support them.

McKenzie, who had been reared in the school of the Northwest Company, and understood how much importance was attached to presents by the Indians, thought it a good idea to imitate the example of the British companies, and have some medals struck in the name of the American Fur Company. Pierre Chouteau, Jr., who attached great weight to McKenzie's opinions, laid the matter before the house in New York in the same letter (August 17, 1831) in which he announced the result of the steamboat voyage to Fort Tecumseh. Referring to the proposed post in the Blackfoot country, then about to be established, he said: "It is at this establishment that we shall have to combat the opposition of the English traders, who have a fort not far distant, and who, as is their custom, will undoubtedly do everything in their power to excite the Indians against us. This difficulty might nevertheless be somewhat diminished if the government could be persuaded to place at our disposal a few presents, which would be delivered to the Indians in the name of the President of the United States. The English government, if I am well informed, allows the Northwest Company¹⁷ an annual sum for this particular purpose. A little indulgence of this nature on the part of the government will secure the confidence and friendship of these savages toward us."

Mr. Crooks wrote to Washington, and the War Department consented that the company might make some medals on its own account. The way in which the government delegated a function which belonged only to itself, but con-

¹⁷ This name survived in common usage after the amalgamation of 1821, when the official name became that of the Hudson Bay Company.



THE ASTOR MEDAL

cealed its action under a fiction of words, is described in a letter from Crooks to Chouteau November 16, 1832: "For Mr. McKenzie's *coat of mail*¹⁸ I have sent to England, for nothing of the sort could be found here. His *fusil à six coups* is ordered from Rochester; and the medals for his outfit are in the hands of the die-maker, who, I hope, will give us a good likeness *de notre estimable grand-papa* [Astor]. I wrote to Washington about them, and the War Office made no objections to our having these *ornaments* made. Remember they are *ornaments*, not medals!"

These medals later gave the company trouble, when some of its enemies reported to Washington that it was usurping the functions of the government in their distribution. Some correspondence resulted but the matter was never carried up. Mr. Chouteau stated in his reply to an inquiry from Washington that "before the die for the Astor medals was struck the matter was submitted to Governor Cass, then Secretary of War, who gave his consent to the measure, and a sample of the medals was deposited with the department, accompanied by letters of the President of the American Fur Company." The privilege of using these medals was discontinued by order of the Secretary of War, March 22, 1844.¹⁹

By means of the intelligent and energetic measures described in the few preceding pages the American Fur Company extended and consolidated its trade upon the upper rivers. The unpleasant task remains to record those less honorable measures which it did not scruple to resort to for the accomplishment of its purposes.

¹⁸ What McKenzie proposed to do with his coat of mail can only be conjectured. It may simply have been an adjunct to the high state which he maintained in the remote post where he ruled as lord of the country round about.

¹⁹ Only two or three of the Astor medals are known to be now in existence. The photograph here reproduced is of one in possession of Mr. F. J. Haynes, of St. Paul. It is also understood that there is one in the possession of the Chouteaus of St. Louis, and another in the possession of the Astors. The origin and history of the medals have never before been given.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AMERICAN FUR COMPANY. STRESS OF COMPETITION.

Standards of business—Dealing with opposition companies—The French Fur Company—The affair with Leclerc—The Sublette-Campbell opposition—McKenzie victorious—Arrangement with Sublette and Campbell—Importance of liquor in the trade—McKenzie depressed at the outlook—The distillery project—Voyage of 1833—Distillery established at Fort Union—Successful operation—Wyeth reports McKenzie—General Clark calls for an explanation—The operation of the distillery suspended—Dangerous complications.

IN regard to the standard of business morality observed in the affairs of the American Fur Company, it was simply that of the business world today—no better, no worse. The ruthless code of competition which finds expression in the correspondence of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., in such instructions as *coûte que coûte* and *écrasez toute opposition*, is the world wide rule of business affairs. The only difference between the American Fur Company and the great concerns of modern times is in the fact that the fur business was mostly conducted where the arm of the law did not reach. The merciless rivalry, which is now toned down by force of law to an outward semblance of equitable dealing, broke out in its true hideous colors when beyond the reach of legal jurisdiction. Competition, which even in this day precipitates unseemly railroad wars, then meant war of the genuine sort. It is difficult to exaggerate the state of affairs which at times prevailed. "The company," by which is always meant the American Fur Company, was thoroughly hated even by its own servants. Throughout its career it was an object of popular execration, as all grasping

monopolies are. Many are the stories, largely exaggerated, no doubt, that have come down to us of its hard and cruel ways. Small traders stood no show whatever and the most desperate measures were resorted to without scruple to get them out of the way. Many an employe, it is said, who had finished his term of service and had started for St. Louis with a letter of credit for his pay fell by the way and was reported as killed by the Indians. These harsher features of a heartless business it is difficult to believe, but the fact that such traditions have persisted even to the present day is not compatible with the theory of entire innocence.

The first step always taken in dealing with an "opposition" was to crush it by sheer force if possible. When that did not succeed an attempt would be made to buy it out, admit it to an interest in the company, or divide the field with it. In one way or another the American Fur Company succeeded in maintaining itself against all comers, although it was sometimes badly frightened, and occasionally came near calling down upon itself the strong arm of the government. A few examples will be given.

The first opposition which the American Fur Company had to contend with after its union with the Columbia Fur Company was what was then known as the French Fur Company. It is thus referred to in a letter from Chouteau to McKenzie written July 5, 1829: "It now remains for me to tell you of the new company which is lately formed here, consisting of eight partners, who are Messrs. Papin, Chenie fils, the two Cerrés, Delaurier, Picotte, Denis Guion and Louis Bonfort, with an equipment of \$16,000, of which each partner contributes an equal share. These gentlemen have done, and are still doing, everything in their power to debauch all our clerks. . . . You can not but see how important it is for our future interests to make every effort this year to arrest this opposition from the start." This company, like most associations where all enter on equal terms without subordination of members to duly constituted officials, had a brief and inglorious career. It occupied

numerous positions in the upper Missouri country close to the American Fur Company posts and commenced business with the usual bravado and pretense employed by concerns of its calibre. But it made no permanent impression anywhere. It maintained a lingering existence for two years and then sold out to the company. The transfer of its principal establishment, which stood just across the Teton river from Fort Tecumseh, took place October 14, 1830. Papin, Picotte, and one of the Cerrés entered the company's service.

In the year 1831 one Narcisse Leclerc,¹ late an employe of the company, having laid by a small saving which some associates eked out to a respectable amount, concluded to try his own hand at the business. As he had gained considerable knowledge of the trade, the company felt that he might give them some annoyance, and his first year's work tended to confirm this apprehension. It was resolved to get rid of his opposition before he should get up the river with his outfit in 1832. How to do this was not so easy a matter, for although there was as yet no legal jurisdiction in the remote region where the trade was conducted, yet the very license of the company was dependent upon the government authorities, who might and would revoke it if convinced that it was being abused. Whatever was done must therefore be under color of the law. The problem was left to J. P. Cabanne, an enterprising agent of the company in

¹Leclerc was a shrewd character and quite a match in craftiness for those with whom he had to deal. He was outfitted by Henry Shaw under the style of the Northwest Fur Company. He cherished a full share of the general dislike for the American Fur Company and its agents. Referring to Leclerc and his first expedition in 1831, Laidlaw said to McKenzie in a letter from Fort Tecumseh, November 27, 1831: "I have heard nothing of Leclerc since I last wrote you, and as the ice is now drifting a little, I am in hopes he will not get up this far. But even if he does, I am well prepared for him and shall have some one at his heels all the time. He told Papin that nothing would do him so much good as to go puffing a cigar alongside of you and put on a dignified look. I expect the gentleman would take care not to get too close."

charge of its affairs near Council Bluffs. He was authorized in extremity to offer Leclerc a cash payment if he would not go as far up the river as the Sioux country, but confine himself to the trade below. Soon after Leclerc set out up the river with his outfit, Cabanne left St. Louis for his post where he arrived considerably in advance of Leclerc.

In the meantime circumstances had thrown in Cabanne's way an excuse for adopting radical measures. When the company's steamboat came down the river from its Yellowstone trip of 1832 the master of the boat was informed at Leavenworth that no more liquor would be allowed to pass that point as the importation of that article into the Indian country had been prohibited by law.² Nevertheless Leclerc was authorized by General William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to take with him two hundred and fifty gallons of alcohol. Chouteau protested against this, but General Clark would not revoke the license, as it seems he had not yet been officially notified of the passage of the new law. He gave to Chouteau also authority to send with the company's outfit one thousand four hundred gallons. Knowing that it would be too late if he waited until the following spring Chouteau turned the *Yellowstone* about and sent her to Council Bluffs with an outfit including the liquor. When the boat reached Leavenworth the liquor was all confiscated. Leclerc, on the other hand, either by favor or subterfuge, had succeeded in getting by with his, and was already safe on his way to the Indian country and well out of reach before the news got back to St. Louis. The prospect looked dubious enough to the company, for two hundred and fifty gallons of alcohol judiciously used would be hard to contend against. It was too late to remedy the evil and nothing but Cabanne's ingenuity now stood in the way of an embarrassing opposition.

A few days before Leclerc reached Bellevue three of Cabanne's men deserted, carrying off one of his skiffs. On

² Act of July 9, 1832.

the way down the river, they met Leclerc and hired out to him. Cabanne himself met Leclerc about twenty miles below his post whither he had gone with some Indian annuities. He demanded restitution of the deserters, but having no force with him, could not compel their release. When they arrived at Bellevue he had his men seize them and put them in irons. They told Cabanne that Leclerc had a lot of liquor in his outfit. This information gave Cabanne the pretext he wanted. Here was a trader clandestinely violating the law by carrying liquor into the Indian country. He would stop the illegal transaction and thereby put an end to the whole expedition. It seems not to have occurred to Cabanne that the enforcement of law is entrusted only to duly accredited officials and that he was not one of these; that his only power in the case was to report Leclerc to the proper authorities. He did not worry himself about fine distinctions of that sort. Instead, he sent his clerk — Sarpy, a man of courage and spirit — with an armed party, equipped with a small cannon, to capture Leclerc and his whole outfit. In this party was Joseph La Barge,³ then a lad of only seventeen, on his first trip to the Indian country. This rude initiation into the life of the wilderness made a lasting impression upon him. Sarpy took his party to a point above the post which commanded the river where the channel lay very close to the shore. When Leclerc came along he ordered him to surrender or he would blow him out of the water. This Leclerc did promptly, and perhaps willingly, and party and outfit were escorted back to the post, where the liquor was confiscated and put in the warehouse. It is said that Cabanne offered to restore the goods to Leclerc, but if he did

³ Joseph La Barge, the most distinguished of the Missouri river pilots, was born in St. Louis October 1, 1815, and died in the same city, April 3, 1899. Nearly all his active life was spent in steamboating on the Missouri. He made and lost a fortune at the business. He served for many years on the American Fur Company steamboats. He was a man of high character and the best representative of a class of men — the Missouri River Pilot — whose business has entirely passed away.

so, Leclerc declined, for he was too shrewd not to see that he could gather a better winter's trade back in St. Louis than he could at his trading posts. It is not probable that the offer was made, and certainly not unless Cabanne had become alarmed at the consequences of his arbitrary proceeding and thus sought to avert them.

At any rate Leclerc hastened back to St. Louis and brought suit against the company, while criminal proceedings were instituted against Cabanne. The matter was carried to Washington and an outcry was made against permitting the company longer to remain in the Indian country. The exigency was certainly a grave one for the company and required all its ingenuity and resources to avert disaster. For Cabanne the case seemed quite hopeless, threatening him with financial ruin, if nothing worse.⁴ A compromise was finally reached by paying Leclerc the sum of \$9,200, which was charged to the account of the Upper Missouri Outfit.

In a letter to Joshua Pilcher who had succeeded Cabanne at Bellevue, notifying him of the outcome of the case, Chouteau expressed his regret that Cabanne, instead of resorting to such heroic measures, had not offered Leclerc outright a thousand dollars not to go so far as to interfere with the trade of the upper river. This observation effectually explodes the claim of the company and of Cabanne, put forward with such a show of innocence, that their sole purpose in stopping Leclerc was to prevent his violating the law. Their object was to keep him out of the trade, and the

⁴ "If it were not for the unreasonable excitement that exists against our friend in Missouri, and which no doubt great pains will be taken to keep alive, I should not despair of Mr. Cabanne's escaping with light damages or perhaps acquittal. The strong point of defence, in my opinion, should be that at the time Leclerc was stopped and brought back he was violating the law of the land excluding ardent spirits entirely from the Indian country; that General Clark's permission was no protection after the Act of July 9, 1832, was published, and with its provisions Mr. Leclerc was bound to be acquainted. You have, however, I dare say, the best advice your country affords, but it seems to me that in case of defeat I would appeal the case to the Supreme Court of the United States." W. B. Astor to Chouteau, March 14, 1833.

presence of the liquor gave them a pretext to accomplish their purpose by a short cut. Cabanne succeeded in this perfectly, but in so doing he ruined his own career in the Indian country.

The strongest opposition which the American Fur Company ever encountered on the Missouri was that of the firm of Sublette and Campbell which was formed on the 20th of December, 1832. Both of the partners were experienced traders and of the highest business standing. Supported as they were by General Ashley, then a member of Congress, their credit was practically unlimited and there were any number of capitalists who were ready to furnish them means. Immediately after the partnership was formed preparation was made to oppose the American Fur Company at all points with an equipment which should equal or surpass their own. Coming, as this opposition did, just at the time when McKenzie felt that he was at last firmly established in all the region of the upper Missouri and Yellowstone, it was not pleasant news to that ambitious trader. But the peril, far from discouraging him, served only to strengthen his determination to succeed in spite of it.

Sublette and Campbell divided their forces for the summer campaign of 1833. Campbell took a party to the mountains and met the Rocky Mountain Fur Company at the Green river rendezvous in the middle of July. Thence he made his way to the mouth of the Yellowstone where he arrived with Milton Sublette, N. J. Wyeth and others August 24th. In the meanwhile Sublette had ascended the Missouri in the steamboat *Otto* with a splendid equipment, leaving parties to establish posts at nearly all the points occupied by the American Fur Company. At some point on the way, probably at Pierre or Clark, he sent the steamboat back and himself went on with a keelboat to the mouth of the Yellowstone. Here he met Campbell and Milton Sublette on the 27th of August, and immediately set about selecting a site for a post. That chosen was on the north bank of the Missouri opposite the mouth of the Yellowstone,

almost exactly where Fort Buford afterward stood, and about three miles by land or six by water below Fort Union. The post was christened Fort William in honor of the elder Sublette. Having made his arrangements he left Campbell to conduct affairs at this important station while he returned with the keelboat to St. Louis.

The success of this new and really formidable opposition during the fall trade of 1833 may best be told by Mr. McKenzie himself, bearing in mind the natural desire of the narrator to make out a good case in his own behalf. The account is, however, substantially correct as shown by evidence derived from the opposition itself. Writing to D. D. Mitchell, at Fort McKenzie under date of January 21, 1834, Mr. McKenzie said: "Sublette and Campbell arrived here August 29th, and soon fixed on a site for their fort which they have built two miles below me and called Fort William. They came up in great force with a very large outfit and abundance of alcohol and wines highly charged with spirits. They engaged the three young Deschamps as interpreters at salaries of \$500 per annum each, and Tom Kipland at \$600. They had, moreover, a full complement of clerks and seemed prepared to carry all before them, nothing doubting but that they would secure at least one half the trade of the country. They abandoned the idea of sending to the Blackfeet this season. They started a small equipment on horses to the Crow village on Wind river. They were expected to return early in December but have not yet been heard of. Mr. Winter and J. Beckwith passed the fall in the Crow camp and traded all their beaver. While Mr. Winter was with the Crows Mr. Fitzpatrick of the R. M. F. Co. (my friend Captain Stewart was with him) arrived with thirty men, one hundred horses, and mules, merchandise, etc., etc., and encamped near the village. He had not been long there before a large party paid him a visit and pillaged everything he had, taking even the watch from his pocket and the capote from his back; also driving off all his horses. This has been a severe blow to Sublette and Campbell. And al-

though on their first start here they made great show and grand promise to the Indians and although among the men nothing was talked about but the new company, they live now at the sign of 'The case is altered.' Their interpreters have quarreled and left them, and are now working hard for me. The Indians find their promises mere empty words and are applying continually to me to engage them. They have a post near to Rivière au Tremble in opposition to Chardon where they are doing literally nothing. Chardon has it all his own way. They have another post on the Yellowstone in opposition to Pillot and Brazeau and there they get no robes although they offer a blanket of scarlet for a robe.

"You must be aware that I have not been asleep this fall. It has cost me something to secure the Indians to me, but being determined to get the peltries, nothing has been neglected that would carry my point. My opponents can not by any means get peltries sufficient to pay the wages of their men. At the Gros Ventres and Mandans they have not even robes to sleep on. At the Mandans my last account states that Picotte has eighty packs of robes and five hundred beaver, the opposition two packs of robes and eight beaver, and I hope things are equally promising lower down. On my return from Fort Pierre, Mr. Campbell called on me. W. Sublette had previously gone down stream on his way to St. Louis and proposed to sell out to me all their interest on the river. I listened to his terms, but was by no means disposed to buy out an opposition, when all my old experienced and faithful clerks and tradesmen felt so certain of driving them out; especially on my giving them *carte blanche* with respect to trade at their respective posts, of course to be used with discretion but with this condition, that all peltries must be secured for the A. F. Co. and thus far I have no reason to complain. The new company is now in bad odor and must sink."

That McKenzie's estimate of his success was not much exaggerated is clear from the evidence of Charles Larpenteur

who at this time was in the employ of Campbell at Fort William. "The Indians," he said, "had no confidence in his [Campbell's] remaining, so that the bulk of the trade went to the big American Fur Company in spite of all we could do. . . . This post [Fort William] was not the only one that was out of luck for all those along the Missouri proved a failure."

How did McKenzie accomplish this? Very much as the Standard Oil Company today crushes any rival enterprise that may dare to show its head in any part of the United States. His letter to Mitchell shows that. The "*carte blanche*" to the clerks simply meant that they might pay the Indians any price, however high, for furs, and might make use of any amount of liquor that was necessary to secure the trade. At the Mandan post as high as twelve dollars was paid for beaver skins. McKenzie might well say "it has cost me something to secure the Indians to me" when in order to do it he was compelled to pay four times the usual price for furs. Of course such competition wiped out all profits and it was simply a question of resources as to which competitor could hold out the longer. In this McKenzie with the great company at his back had every advantage; and his victory was practically won at the close of the season's trade.

So confident did McKenzie feel of his ability to drive off his competitors that he would not even listen to their overtures to sell out to him. He was therefore much chagrined when he found that the house at St. Louis had taken the matter into their own hands without consulting him and had entered into an arrangement with Sublette. The fact was that the home officials were a good deal more frightened than McKenzie and thought it best to come to terms. Their action and the reasons for it are thus explained in a letter to McKenzie dated April 8, 1834: "By the enclosed agreement you will see that we have concluded an arrangement at New York with Mr. Sublette. We take such of his equipment in merchandise, utensils, etc., as remains at the

close of the season's trade and we retire from the mountain trade for the ensuing year. . . . In making this arrangement our object was to keep Sublette from purchasing a new equipment and from connecting himself with houses that were making him all sorts of offers. His reputation and that of his patron, Ashley, whatever may be the cause, are far above their worth. Nevertheless such is the fact and it is enough to procure them unlimited credit. It is this which induced us to offer to buy them out. . . . We hope, therefore, that, taking all things into consideration you will approve of the transaction."

This was the end of the Sublette-Campbell enterprise on the Missouri and it left the American Fur Company untrammelled by any serious opposition for several years to come. The arrangement is the only one by which the fur territory was ever divided among the traders, and this was only for a single year. The many statements in contemporary accounts of these events, that the American and Rocky Mountain Fur Companies entered into agreements of this character, are without foundation.

In all of McKenzie's work, as just narrated, there was nothing for which he can be properly criticised. He had done nothing that is not recognized the world over as legitimate business. It does not appear that he was privy to the robbery of Fitzpatrick, however glad he may have been that it took place. Nowhere in his relations with his competitors did he treat them more severely than the recognized code of business permits, and his standing with his opponents was as high as with his own people. But, unfortunately, under the heavy strain of competition of the year 1832, he permitted himself to take a false step, which, like that of Cabanne in the Leclerc affair, ended his usefulness in the Indian country.

Among the articles of trade, as already explained, which were exchanged for the furs of the Indians, liquor was by far the most important. It is indeed impossible to exaggerate its importance; and it is only by an intimate under-

standing of the conditions of the business that one can account for the almost frantic appeals which were continually pouring into St. Louis for more liquor. "Liquor we must have or we might as well give up," is a sample of the complaints which burdened the correspondence of the traders. It was impossible to conduct the trade without it if one's opponents were provided with it. The only alternative was to retire from the field. The Act of July 9, 1832, prohibiting absolutely the introduction of liquor into the Indian country, was therefore simply appalling to McKenzie. Here was the great opposition of Sublette and Campbell which he must encounter the following year. He had no confidence that they would be held to the law by the inspectors and he knew that if they were they would smuggle liquor by them. He had learned from experience that the great prominence of the American Fur Company made such clandestine work doubly difficult, for the company was always operating as it were in the enemy's country, where there was a spy at every turn.

One point in McKenzie's mind was settled from the start. Law or no law he must be equipped with liquor when the outfit of Sublette and Campbell should come to oppose him. His first move was to go to Washington and New York and see if he could not effect some modification of the regulation for enforcing the law. The stock argument on such occasions always was that the liquor was wanted only to resist the competition of British traders who made free use of it along the line. McKenzie was entirely unsuccessful in his mission, and returned to St. Louis with gloomy forebodings of the future.⁵ There was no course now open, apart from extensive smuggling, which was an extremely perilous business for the company at that time, except to carry out an ingenious and radical measure, which for some


⁵ "The total exclusion of ardent spirits, and the difficulties that may grow out of our friend Cabanne's imprudent course toward Leclerc, have disheartened Mr. McKenzie very much, and he parted with me [at Washington] in desponding anticipations of the future." Crooks to Chouteau, February 17, 1833.

time had been developing in McKenzie's mind. This was nothing less than to open up a distillery at Fort Union and commence the manufacture of liquor on his own account. He would be within the law, he reasoned, because that forbade only the *importation* of liquor into the Indian country! To such feeble subterfuges did the exigencies of the fur trade drive men of real and unquestioned ability! The house in St. Louis took legal advice in the matter, and, astonishing as it may seem, succeeded in getting an opinion in favor of the project. Armed with this they made bold to disregard the advice of that sage counselor in New York, Ramsay Crooks, who earnestly besought them to abandon any thought of so hazardous a venture. In the letter quoted in the footnote above he said: "The excitement against us is undoubtedly greater than it ought to be, but whether well or ill founded, the effect is not the less injurious, and we are looked upon by many as an association determined to engross the trade of the upper Missouri, by fair means if we can, but by foul proceedings if nothing short will ensure our objects. With such a reputation it becomes us to be more than usually circumspect in all we do. Every eye is upon us, and whoever can will annoy us with all his heart. It will therefore, in my opinion, be madness to attempt your Cincinnati project of the *Boxes*, or the *Alembique*." What *Boxes* refers to does not elsewhere appear, but the *Alembique* scheme grew into a shining reality, which very soon justified Crooks' opinion of it as a scheme of "madness."

Referring to the competition of British traders which the Western Department had represented to the house in New York as the principal reason why they must use liquor in the trade, and to overtures on the part of the United States to Great Britain that both nations prohibit the traffic along the border, Mr. Crooks said: "If the Government of Britain reject the proposal, their object will evidently be to drive us out of the country, and deprive the United States of a trade which justly belongs to her citizens; and I can not allow myself to believe that after such unequivocal proof of their

real intentions, our own Government will persist in denying us the use of ardent spirits so far as the article is required to place us on an equal footing with our commercial rivals. But still, if in the face of reason and common sense, the Executive will not have the law so modified as to afford us a fair chance with our Hudson Bay opponents, I would, hard as it is, rather abandon the trade, than violate the statute if that was necessary to sustain ourselves against them."

Unhappily these wiser counsels did not prevail. A still was procured and arrangements were made to put it into early operation. Two boats went up the river in the spring of 1833, the *Yellowstone* and a new boat, the *Assiniboine*. On the *Yellowstone* were two distinguished passengers, McKenzie himself, and Maximilian Prince of Wied, whose journey to the upper river on this occasion has done so much to preserve the early history of that country. The voyage passed off prosperously enough until Fort Leavenworth was reached. McKenzie had determined to try his luck in getting some liquor past the inspectors, but his attempt quickly came to grief. The inspection was very strict. Maximilian lamented that "they would scarcely permit us to take a small portion to preserve our specimens of natural history." McKenzie wrote to Chouteau from the Black Snake Hills (St. Joseph) to the following effect: "We have been robbed of all our liquors, say seven barrels shrub, one of rum, one of wine and all the fine men and sailors' whiskey which was in two barrels. They kicked and knocked about everything they could find and even cut through our bales of blankets which had never been undone since they were put up in England." It is apparent that the inspectors handled the cargo without ceremony, and that all the liquor was confiscated. The affair worried McKenzie, as he said, so much that he could not rest. He had obtained what seemed to be indisputable proof that Sublette and Campbell had on their steamboat one hundred of the flat alcohol kegs used in the mountains. "The more I think of it," he wrote, "the clearer I see the injury we are




going to sustain by being deprived of that article." To add to his anxiety he had so far failed to find a suitable man for operating his distillery. But he had to make a virtue of necessity and go on handicapped as he was.

On his way up he put off a force of laborers at the mouth of the Iowa river to start a corn plantation, for it was upon corn that he would mainly have to rely for his distillery. He probably took along a cargo of corn from Council Bluffs on his way. At Fort Pierre the *Yellowstone* turned back, while McKenzie and Maximilian went on in the *Assiniboine* and arrived without further incident at Fort Union on the 24th of June.

The distillery was at once set up and was in operation when Wyeth passed Fort Union two months later. There is abundant evidence that the experiment was a complete success. McKenzie was greatly elated over the result, for it placed him on a footing of independence and unquestioned superiority over his rivals. His letters on the subject, written in the following December, are interesting reading. To Chouteau he wrote: "Our manufactory flourishes admirably. We only want corn to keep us going. The Mandan corn yields badly but makes a fine, sweet liquor. Do not load the boat too heavily at St. Louis, that a few hundred bushels of corn may be placed on board at the Bluffs. . . . Surely you will contrive some means of passing alcohol to the Bluffs for the Sioux trade. It is hard that new hands and limited means should have such advantages over us." And to Crooks in reference to Sublette and Campbell: "We have every advantage that experience of the Indian trade and knowledge of the Indians can give, but at the lower posts they have abundance of alcohol and we are destitute, and you know how fond some Indians are of strong water. For this post I have established a manufactory of strong water. It succeeds admirably. I have a good corn mill, a respectable distillery, and can produce as fine a liquor as need be drunk. I believe that no law of the United States is thereby broken [!] though perhaps one may be made to

break up my distillery. But liquor I must have or quit any pretension to trade in this part." By the same express he sent a letter to Pilcher at Council Bluffs urging him to send up a good supply of corn in the spring, or, he added "my wine vats will be idle."

But alas! at the very moment in which McKenzie was writing his exultant letter to his chief in St. Louis, the latter was agitated with very different emotions, for he had but lately experienced in a forcible way the truth of the adage that the way of the transgressor is not an easy one. The distillery business had been reported to the United States Government, and mischief enough was to pay. It happened in this way: On August 24, 1833, there arrived at Fort Union that irrepressible Yankee adventurer, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, who was on his way east in the interests of his business. With him was also M. S. Cerré, Captain Bonneville's principal man. McKenzie received these gentlemen with true fur trader hospitality, in which he had been admirably schooled during his service with the British Northwest Company. His house was wide open to his guests. He gave them the best that he had — bread, cheese, milk, excellent meat, and even wine — luxuries which they had not tasted for many a long month. He showed them about his post, explained everything, and in his enthusiasm so far forgot his wonted discretion as to permit them to see the distillery. The guests were most agreeably impressed with the liberality of their host, and probably would have left him with a sense of obligation that would have put a bridle on their tongues, had it not been for a circumstance that marked the close of their visit. They bought a considerable quantity of supplies from McKenzie, and applied to him for some liquor. They then quickly learned the difference between the generous host and the competing trader. No liquor was to be had. McKenzie was not going to arm his opponents with the most powerful weapon which they could wield against him. When they came to make settlement for their purchases they again found that they were dealing with the



trader and no longer with the host. There was no hospitality in the prices charged, which were all on the basis of the exorbitant retail prices of the Indian country. Wyeth and Cerré were indignant at this treatment, but, smothering their resentment, they settled their bills without a murmur and bided their time for revenge.

The opportunity was not long delayed. When the irate travelers arrived at Fort Leavenworth they appeared before an Indian agent at that place and made affidavit to the facts that they had observed at Fort Union, and alleged that the American Fur Company was there "making and vending whiskey in quantity." The agent promptly wrote to General Wm. Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, setting forth the information contained in the affidavits. General Clark in turn wrote to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., November 14th, enclosing the communication from the Indian agent, and asking for such explanation as he should "think proper to give." Nine days later Chouteau returned an answer which, for ingenuity, surpassed even the distillery scheme itself. After protesting ignorance that operations were being carried on at Union "in the manner and to the extent stated," and disclaiming all responsibility for such unauthorized acts, he gave the following statement of the extent of the company's connection with the matter: "The company, believing that wild pears and berries might be converted into wine (which they did not understand to be prohibited), did authorize experiments to be made, and if, under color of this, ardent spirits have been distilled and vended, it is without the knowledge, authority, or direction of the company, and I will take measures, by sending immediately an express to arrest the operation complained of, if found to exist." The express was sent and the disappointed McKenzie was destined to see his brilliant prospects blasted in their bloom.

In sending the express, Chouteau so far forgot his own part in the affair as to administer a rebuke to McKenzie for "having placed the company in an unpleasant

situation." McKenzie was cut to the quick, and replied that while he was perfectly willing to be made the scapegoat in the affair, providing "the company be thereby benefited," yet he would not permit the imputation that he had taken any step to which the management at St. Louis was not a party. In spite of his irritation, however, he hastened to his patron's assistance, and fabricated two letters designed to furnish a plausible explanation of the presence of the distillery at Fort Union. The purport of them was that a friend of McKenzie, living in the Red River colony, had asked him to purchase a still while he was in the States in the spring of 1833, and have it sent to Pembina. McKenzie did this and transported it up the river as far as Fort Union. While holding it there until called for, an American citizen, who knew something about its operation, had turned up at the fort and requested permission to experiment with it upon the "fruits of the country." The request was granted, the distillery set up, and the manufacture of "wine" was begun. The result was satisfactory and a "very palatable article" was produced; but the whole affair was in the nature of a passing experiment, and had no relation to the company's business.

Neither Chouteau's lame excuse to General Clark nor McKenzie's feeble invention served to exculpate the company. The news quickly reached ^{proved} Washington both through official channels and through the many enemies of the company. The government authorities were highly incensed at this obvious contempt of law, and coming as it did upon the heels of the Leclerc incident and Fitzpatrick's robbery,⁶ it came very near proving disastrous. The company had a life

⁶"In a letter to General Ashley, Fitzpatrick accuses the company of having instigated the savages to commit certain depredations of which he was the victim, and it appears that this letter has been sent to the Department of Indian Affairs. The dragoons will perhaps be ordered to make a tour along the base of the mountains, and in that case it is possible that they will pay you a visit. You will therefore prepare for their reception and especially for any *searches* which they may make if they go." Chouteau to McKenzie, April 8, 1834.



and death struggle and it was only by a dangerously narrow margin that it saved its license. How great was the peril may be judged from the following letter sent by the house in St. Louis to McKenzie in the spring of 1834. Referring to the express of the previous winter which went up with orders to stop the use of the distillery, the letter says: "In asking you to stop at once its operation, we now urgently renew the request, and however painful it may be to destroy an establishment which promised such excellent results, it is nevertheless of the most urgent necessity to submit. Otherwise we shall expose ourselves to the greatest embarrassments. It was only by the assurance of our Mr. Chouteau to the Secretary of War that we would conform to the government regulations pertaining to the Indian trade that the affair has not been followed up. Under these circumstances we think it will be prudent to send the still down or to dispose of it otherwise so that it may give offense to no one."⁷

The distillery incident seems to have practically closed McKenzie's career in the Indian country. He came down the river in the summer of 1834 and visited Europe. Upon his return he went back to Union for a short time, but soon left the country and established himself at St. Louis.

⁷On what special plea the company through its political backer, Senator Benton, succeeded in averting disaster is not now very clear, but a hint at the crafty methods employed is furnished in the following letter from Crooks to Chouteau, February 23, 1834: "The General tells me that you had the address to persuade Judge H—— that your distillery at the Yellowstone was only intended to promote the cause of botany. But *prenez-y-garde*. Don't presume too much on your recent escape from an accusation which might have been attended with serious consequences. The less of this sort of business you do, the better, for the time may, and very probably will, come when you will be exposed by the endless number of spies you have around you."


CHAPTER XXII.

THE AMERICAN FUR COMPANY.

1834 - 1843.

Mr. Astor retires — Pratte, Chouteau and Company — The mountain trade — Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company — Opposition in the year 1842 — Andrew Drips made Indian agent — Liquor at Fort Platte — Fox, Livingston and Company — Experience of Mr. Kelsey — Mr. Cutting and the Assiniboine chief — Fox, Livingston and Company retire — Battle of Fort McKenzie — Situation in 1843.

THE year 1834 witnessed a momentous change in the American Fur Company — nothing less than the retirement of its founder from further connection with its affairs. Mr. Astor had for several years meditated this move. He was now advanced in life, and his great wealth relieved him from the necessity of concerning himself in the future with the exacting cares of business life. ✓ But like all earnest and active men, he could not easily bring himself to the point of actual retirement. The reluctance to yield to the truth that age is coming on, together with the real interest which a man of business never ceases to feel in active affairs, made it difficult for him to let go of the company which he, single-handed, had created. It was a monument to his genius such as few men have been able to erect, and it was endeared to him by the very struggles which he had passed through and the difficulties which he had been compelled to overcome. We may well appreciate the force of Mr. Crooks' remark in a letter to Mr. Chouteau while the negotiations for the transfer were going on, that "the business seems to him like an only child and he can not muster courage to part with it." This was written in March, 1833.



It was only three months later that Mr. Astor, from Geneva, Switzerland, addressed the following letter to Messrs. Bernard Pratte and Company, St. Louis, Missouri: "Gentlemen—Wishing to retire from the concern in which I am engaged with your house, you will please to take this as notice thereof, and that the engagement entered into on the 7th of May, 1830, between your house and me, on the part of the American Fur Company, will expire with the outfit of the present year on the terms expressed in said agreement."

Mr. Astor was no doubt partly influenced to take this step in view of impending changes which he foresaw must soon overtake the fur trade. While in London the summer before he had noted the beginning of the downfall of the beaver trade. He said in a letter written at the time: "I very much fear beaver will not sell well very soon unless very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk in place of beaver."

The negotiations thus initiated by Mr. Astor himself came to a termination on the 1st of June, 1834, when the Northern Department, retaining the name of American Fur Company, was sold to a company of which Ramsay Crooks was the principal partner, and the Western Department to Pratte, Chouteau and Company of St. Louis.¹

¹"Mr. J. J. Astor having decided to retire from business, our relations with him have in consequence terminated and our house is today under the style of Pratte, Chouteau and Company. As a consequence of this change, we have found it necessary to make an arrangement with Mr. Sublette by which we make mutual concessions. He is to abandon the Missouri trade and we that of the mountains, after the present expedition, it is understood." Pratte, Chouteau and Company, April 9, 1834.

By a letter of the previous day to McKenzie the latter was requested to come to St. Louis and renew the arrangement with the Upper Missouri Outfit for the next four years.

In adjusting the affairs of the company at this time an appraisement was made of the various posts by representatives of both parties. Mr. Astor's man estimated their value at \$8,250, and Pratte, Chouteau and Company's representatives at \$4,500. These figures show how flimsy most of these structures must have been.

By this important arrangement the American Fur Company retired permanently from the Western trade, which now reverted to the control of the St. Louis traders. The company had been at St. Louis just twelve years, and in that time had established itself beyond the power of any rival concern seriously to disturb it. Although the name American Fur Company did not properly apply to the new firm, it was nevertheless, in popular usage, retained for many years to come.

The affairs of the company during the decade from 1834 to 1843 present nothing of unusual interest. The business continued under the regular routine and no serious opposition arose until 1842. The arrangement with Sublette and Campbell for a division of the fur trade territory did not operate to keep the American Fur Company out of the mountains. Fontenelle took out parties in both the years 1834 and 1835. Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Bridger severed their connection with Sublette in 1834, and formed a partnership with Fontenelle, thus merging the remnants of the expiring Rocky Mountain Fur Company with its great rival on the Missouri. Sublette's new post on the Laramie was bought by Fontenelle and his associates at about the same time and the American Fur Company thus established itself in the last of its great depots of trade. Fort John, as this post came to be known, ranked with McKenzie, Cass, and Clark in importance.

The mountain trade had never succeeded well with the American Fur Company. Their expeditions were scarcely ever on the ground in time to compete with their indefatigable rivals of the Rocky Mountain Company.² They lost heavily from the Indians, and on the whole the trade was far from being profitable. The management at St. Louis became thoroughly tired of this branch of the business, and it was only the fear of loss of prestige with the Indians and

²"We have always been too late [at rendezvous] and our opponents in the country make a great boast of it." Fontenelle to Chouteau, July 31, 1833, from the rendezvous on Green river.

trappers that kept them from abandoning it altogether. The following reference to this subject in a letter from Chouteau to Astor, written May 4, 1833, illustrates the views of the Western Department: "I am convinced that these expeditions have been an annual loss. But we have hoped for improvement from year to year. Generally the loss falls upon the traders. If the expeditions to the upper Missouri had confined themselves entirely to the trade [at regular posts] its returns would have been greater and its expenses much less. Nevertheless, in spite of the unfavorable prospect, I do not think it politic to abandon this trade for the present. Just at the time when Sublette and Company are opposing us on the Missouri it is not for us to leave the mountains exclusively to them."

The mountain business therefore went on much as before. The command of the annual expeditions, after the death of Fontenelle in 1836, was given to Andrew Drips, who retained it until as late as 1840. James Bridger also conducted trapping parties through the mountains for several years in the interest of the American Fur Company.³ About 1840 or 1841 he was associated with Benito Vasquez in charge of an extensive outfit. These two men continued in partnership for several years, and in 1843 built the noted fort on Black's Fork of Green river to which Bridger's name was given. This event marks the termination of the organized fur trade of the Rocky mountains.

In the year 1838 the company management underwent another modification in which the name was changed from Pratte, Chouteau and Company to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company — a name which continued nearly, if not quite,

³ An important event in Rocky mountain history should be placed to the credit of the mountain expeditions of the American Fur Company. In the spring of 1834, W. A. Ferris, who had spent the winter among the Flatheads, made a visit to the Upper Geyser Basin of the Yellowstone Park. He went from a point near where Beaver Canon, Idaho, now is and was at the Upper Basin May 20, 1834. His account of this visit, published in the *Western Literary Messenger*, of Buffalo, New York, is the first published account of this region.

to the date when the company retired permanently from the business.⁴

In the year 1842 the company was again considerably perturbed by the presence of an imposing opposition. No fewer than six rival companies were in the field, some of them for the first time. Lupton and Bent and St. Vrain operated mainly in the territory to the southwest. The principal opposition on the Missouri was Fox, Livingston and Company, and William P. May and Company. On the north fork of the Platte and in the neighboring country the firms of Pratte, Cabanne and Company and Sybille and Company strove to divert a portion of the trade from the company's establishment at Fort John on the Laramie.

The American Fur Company met this formidable opposition by a shrewd move which, during the next four years, proved a great element of strength in its favor. It secured the revival of the office of Indian agent for the tribes of the Upper Missouri and the appointment of one of its own most trusted and experienced traders, Andrew Drips, as agent. It did this upon the ground of putting a stop to the liquor traffic. There can be no doubt of the sincerity of the company in this matter, although its action was based upon purely selfish motives. It had no fear of opposition in the ordinary business of the trade, but it dreaded the use of liquor by its opponents. Without this article its own power would count for nothing, even against the most worthless opponent who might be supplied with it. It was therefore of the first importance to break up the practice of smuggling, and the company for once found itself in the happy position of being able to serve its own interests by a zealous enforcement of the laws of the country.

The correspondence still in the possession of the descendants of Major Drips shows conclusively that the appointment of this able and experienced trader was due to the influ-

⁴ This was in 1864, when the old company sold out to the Northwestern Fur Company, which was organized by J. B. Hubbell of St. Paul, Minn.



ence of the American Fur Company, and that they were not slow to exact a return for their services when he entered upon his new duties.⁵ Never before in the history of the fur trade had any agent taken such energetic measures to enforce the law prohibiting the importation or use of liquor into the Indian country. The new agent traveled over the entire Western country, not even stopping for the cold of winter, and did everything which his limited means permitted to break up the traffic among the opposition traders. At the same time he granted the American Fur Company every possible facility for pursuing their rivals. They were authorized in express terms to establish trading posts wherever Fox, Livingston and Company, or Pratte, Cabanne and Company might establish them. While it is not likely that a man of Major Drips' high character deliberately used his official position for the benefit of his old company, there is no doubt that his administration operated strongly to that end. Mr. F. Cutting, resident agent of Fox, Livingston and Company, openly accused him of gross favoritism to the American Fur Company, and demanded his removal from office. The charges, however, were denied by Major Drips and no notice was taken of them by the Department at Washington.

The opposition to the company on the Platte river was of considerable importance. Pratte, Cabanne and Company, who owned Fort Platte, succeeded in smuggling in some three hundred gallons of alcohol, a portion of which was brought in by a man named Richards, notorious for his character as a lawless desperado. It is supposed that he brought it from the Mexican territory. At this period the practice of smuggling liquor from Santa Fe to the headwaters of the Arkansas and Platte rivers had become a regular business and led the War Department to station a

⁵ "Heretofore *we traders* have never thought the government in earnest when they spoke about liquor. I hope that you will teach us now that such is no longer the case." J. F. A. Sanford, Agent of the American Fur Company, to Drips, July 10, 1843.

company of dragoons on the Arkansas in 1843.⁶ Major Drips sent J. V. Hamilton to Fort Platte to investigate the matter, and armed him with written authority to confiscate the property of the offending company and to expel them from the country. But the shrewd traders were too quick for him. They raised the caches where the liquor was concealed within the fort and hurried it to a secure hiding place outside. When Hamilton arrived he could only find the fresh evidences of the empty caches, and rumors of the recent presence of liquor there, but of positive proof he could find none.

The Fort Platte traders carried on a feeble opposition to the American Fur Company for a number of years, but could make no permanent impression upon the country and finally succumbed to their powerful rival.

The firm of Fox, Livingston and Company, also called the Union Fur Company, and frequently Ebbetts and Cutting from the names of the resident agents, was the most powerful opposition with which the Upper Missouri Outfit ever had to deal excepting only that of Sublette and Campbell ten years before. The rise of this company is thus sketched by Charles Larpenteur in his *Forty Years a Fur Trader*. The partner, Ebbetts, went up the river in 1841 with a small equipment to trade upon his own account. The

“I would particularly call the attention of the Department to a description of traders who reside in the vicinity of the Mexican country on the waters of the Arkansas. They cultivate corn, etc., which they trade to the Indians for robes and skins with which they proceed to Santa Fe and Taos and barter for whiskey, flour, etc. These latter articles they again bring to the Indians with whom they trade in opposition to, and much to the detriment of, the regular licensed traders. They defy a United States agent, and want of a proper force at the latter's command permits them to act with impunity. They reside in two villages, one on the American, and the other within the Mexican, line. They are a mongrel crew of Americans, French, Mexicans, and half-breeds, and, generally speaking, are unable to procure employment on account of past misconduct. In fact, they are no better than outlaws.” Drips to Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent Indian Affairs, St. Louis. Dated at Fort Pierre, April 11, 1845.

American Fur Company did not pay much attention to him and he made an exceedingly profitable trade. Upon the strength of this he went to New York and approached the firm of Fox, Livingston and Company with a view of enlisting them in the business. The evidence of his own success was convincing, and his statement that the American Fur Company was in a bad way and losing its hold upon the country was believed. A new firm was organized for this trade, under the style of the Union Fur Company, and one of its members, a Mr. Kelsey, was deputed to reside in the Indian country and co-operate with the agents, Ebbetts and Cutting, in the management of the business. The license granted the new company enumerated a great number of points throughout the Indian country where they might establish posts; but their principal establishments were fixed at the mouth of the Yellowstone, where old Fort William was re-occupied and called Fort Mortimer, and in the Sioux country twenty miles below Fort Pierre, where the post of Fort George was built.

Promptly with the opening of the season of 1842 the Union Fur Company went up the river with the steamboat *New Haven* laden with a full and complete outfit and proceeded to establish trading posts everywhere in opposition to the American Fur Company. But Mr. Kelsey soon found, as he entered the Indian country, that Mr. Ebbetts' roseate view of the prospects of trade in that region was absurdly overdrawn. It became more and more evident that his company had been grossly deceived and that their enterprise was destined to be a losing one. But they had now gone too far to withdraw, and putting the best face on their dubious prospect, they entered upon their work with every possible proof of a determination to succeed. They exhibited from the start a facility for evading the law and resorting to desperate measures, which was never surpassed even by the American Fur Company itself; and in spite of all that Major Drips could do they succeeded in smuggling quantities of liquor to nearly all of their posts.

Fort George in the Sioux country was their first and principal establishment, and hither Mr. Kelsey retired after a trip on the boat to the mouth of the Yellowstone. Mr. Kelsey found himself in the hands of a most desperate set of outlaws who were ready to go to any length of rascality that opportunity or inclination might suggest. Kelsey made effective use of them for awhile in opposing his rivals. When the trader William P. May came down the river in 1843 with a boat load of furs, Kelsey's men fired upon the boat, compelled him to land, and then confiscated his cargo. As soon as Fort George was established the American Fur Company sent a trader named Bouis down from Fort Pierre to set up a lodge with an assortment of goods to oppose the new company. He had not been there very long before the employes at Fort George, who seemed to be drunk most of the time, made a raid upon him and cut his lodge all to pieces. He was relieved by J. V. Hamilton, who promptly reported to Fort Pierre that the situation at Fort George was such that his life was in continual danger.

In fact Kelsey soon found that he could not himself control the desperate band whom he was using against his opponents. Some of them had established themselves on Simeneau's Island opposite Fort George and near the east shore. Here they took possession of an old cabin and bade defiance to Mr. Kelsey. This gentleman, who seems to have been a man of nerve and spirit, ordered them to leave the island, and upon their refusal to do so armed himself and proceeded to see that his orders were carried out. Two of the men he shot dead on the spot and severely wounded two others. Dreading the consequences of this desperate performance he is said to have left the post following night and to have fled to Mexico. Major Drips secured several affidavits from persons acquainted with the affair and these are now presumably on file in the Department at Washington.

Mr. Cutting, who was left in charge at Fort Mortimer, was confident of his ability to cope with the American Fur

Company; but a little incident that happened soon afterward went far to dispel that illusion. As was the custom when a new opposition came up the river, the Indians paid it some attention. A powerful Assiniboine chief called on Mr. Cutting, from whom he received a brilliant uniform as a present. From his general demeanor Cutting felt sure that he had secured the custom of the chief and his band. When the chief left he went straight to Fort Union, sat down in the private room of Mr. Culbertson, who was then in charge, and after a few moments' silence said: "I suppose you think I have left our big house [Fort Union]. No; I am not a child. I went below to see the chief, who treated me well. I did not ask him for anything. I did not refuse his presents. But these can not make me abandon this house, where are buried the remains of our fathers, whose tracks are yet fresh in all the paths leading to this house. No, I will not abandon this house!" Cutting was completely undone when he heard this news, and concluded that the American Fur Company was not, after all, in so bad a way as his associate Ebbetts had represented.

The Union Fur Company continued to do a losing business for about three years, their affairs constantly going from bad to worse. Their better class of employes, feeling that they were on a sinking ship, withdrew from their employ, leaving them only the most abandoned and reckless characters in the country. Finally, in the spring of 1845, they sold out to the American Fur Company, thus closing the career of the last of the opposition companies which we shall have occasion to notice.⁷

In the summer of 1833, the year following the establishment of Fort McKenzie, an important incident occurred at that post. Notwithstanding the inviolable peace which the

⁷ "The Union Fur Company has sold their entire stock in the country to P. Chouteau, Jr., & Company. I am sorry to inform you that they leave in the country upwards of fifty men—a mongrel set of half-breeds and white men, the greater part notorious for their misconduct here as well as in the civilized world." Drips to Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent Indian Affairs. Dated Fort Pierre, May 18, 1845.

Assiniboines had promised McKenzie should thenceforth subsist between them and the Blackfeet, those Indians from some cause or other grew tired of the compact and proceeded to treat it as of no effect. On the morning of August 28th, 1833, they made a bold attack upon a party of Blackfeet who were encamped around the fort. Quite a number of Indians were killed at the first onslaught, but the Blackfeet were quickly admitted into the fort from which a counter attack was vigorously returned. The battle continued in a desultory fashion all day and ended in the discomfiture of the Assiniboines. Prince Maximilian was in the post at the time, and has left a vivid picture from his pen, as his artist, Bodmer, did from his pencil, of this exciting affair.⁸

No other event of unusual interest transpired at this remote outpost until 1842. F. A. Chardon, an able but unscrupulous man, and something of a desperate character when his evil nature was once aroused, was in charge. It happened that in the winter of 1842-3 a negro belonging to Chardon, to whom he was greatly attached, was killed by the Blood Indians. Chardon vowed vengeance and found a ready coadjutor in Alexander Harvey, one of the most abandoned desperadoes known to the fur trade. A general massacre was planned but it only partially succeeded.⁹ Enough was done, however, to embitter the Indians so that the further usefulness of Fort McKenzie was at an end. Chardon accordingly abandoned the post in the summer of 1843 and built another farther down, at the mouth of the Judith, and called it Fort Chardon. The Indians promptly burned the old post. Strange to say the name of the old post lapsed entirely so far as popular usage was concerned, and it came to be known only as Fort Brulé and its site as Brulé Bottom.

The year 1843, with which our present studies terminate, found the American Fur Company occupying all the ground that it had ever won, but still having to fight, as it always had

⁸ See Part IV., Chapter IV.

⁹ See notice of Harvey, Part IV., Chapter VII.

done, for its existence. Just at this time the prospects of the Upper Missouri Outfit were particularly gloomy. Fox, Livingston and Company were at the best of their career and were causing the company no little anxiety. Bridger had made almost a total failure of his latest mountain expeditions and had practically announced the death knell of the mountain trade by building a post in the heart of the old fur country for the *convenience of emigrants*. The company was still to survive for a score of years, but it required no prophet to see that the sun of its prosperity, so far as the fur trade was concerned, was on the decline.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE AMERICAN FUR COMPANY.

METHODS AND MEN.

Financial Stability of the American Fur Company — Conservative management — Business arrangements — Opposition companies — Measures of policy — Able men in the American Fur Company — Ramsay Crooks — Pierre Chouteau, Jr. — Kenneth McKenzie — William Laidlaw — Alexander Culbertson — David D. Mitchell — James Archdale Hamilton — James Kipp — Daniel Lamont — The Sarpy family — Lucien Fontenelle — William Henry Vanderburgh — Jacob Halsey — Joseph A. Sire — Charles Larpenteur — Warren Angus Ferris.

IN the general discussion upon the business methods of the fur trade much has already been said that applies to the American Fur Company. Only those special features which distinguish it from other trading concerns need therefore be noticed here.

The chief elements of strength which made the American Fur Company such a power in the Indian country were the great wealth and business sagacity of its founder. Its formidable financial backing gave to its operations a degree of force and stability which none of the other American fur companies possessed. Reverses which would have ruined an ordinary concern scarcely caused a ripple on the current of its affairs. If competing traders stood in the way, and could not be crushed by opposition, the exhaustless reservoir of Mr. Astor's pocket-book could buy them out. The onward march of the company was therefore that of resistless power and even the great opposition of the St. Louis traders was finally forced to give way.

The operations of the company, moreover, were always conducted with caution and sound judgment. Its career

was marked by few brilliant strokes of policy, but rather by a conservative and continuous advance so fortified and supported that each step was permanent progress. It permitted other and more adventurous concerns to break the ground in new and dangerous territory rather than run the risk of invading those untried fields.¹ Thus every point of its territory on the upper river had previously been occupied by the Missouri or Columbia Fur Companies or by General Ashley. This was not perhaps much to the credit of its courage, but greatly to the advantage of its business. The American Fur Company never met with anything like the brilliant success of General Ashley, but if its particular gains were not great, they were many and continuous, and the aggregate was always large.

The goods for the trade were generally imported or purchased in New York under the immediate direction of the home office. Those going to the Northern Department were sent to Lake Erie and shipped from Black Rock to posts on the lakes and the upper Mississippi. Those bound for the Western Department were generally sent by way of New Orleans, particularly after the advent of steamboats. Shipments were also often made by way of Pittsburg, and occasionally by way of the lakes.

St. Louis was the headquarters of the Western Department, as Michilimackinac was of the Northern. It was the outfitting point for the entire country to the westward, and for the posts on the Mississippi as far up as Prairie du Chien. The lower Missouri posts were supplied by independent outfits, but the entire river above the present location of Sioux City was included in a single equipment, called the Upper Missouri Outfit.

The goods, in their long journey from Europe to the interior of this continent, passed through three distinct agencies before their final destination was reached. They

¹ To this general rule the enterprise of the Pacific Fur Company was a notable exception, as was also the establishment of Fort Piegan among the Blackfeet.

were generally furnished by Mr. Astor at a fixed advance upon cost and charges. They then went through the house at St. Louis, where the various outfits for each year were made up. Here there was a second regular advance. To this point the profits were fixed and certain, and the chances of loss very small. It was not until the traders at the company houses in the interior were reached that the struggle of the business began. The trader's profits were largely dependent upon his own efforts. He ran the risks of loss from hostile Indians, competing traders, and the many other difficulties that beset his business. On the whole the trade arrangements of the American Fur Company were grossly one-sided and unfair. They threw the risks of loss upon those who had the burden of the work to perform. Thus the heavy damages of nearly ten thousand dollars which the affair of Cabanne and Leclerc cost the company, were charged to the "U. M. O.," although the house in St. Louis was in the fullest sense a party to the transaction. It is not a pleasing reflection that the profits of this extensive business found their way into a few hands while those who bore its hardships and dangers beyond the frontiers of civilization and the comforts and luxuries thereof, generally ended their careers in comparative poverty if not in actual want.²

In the multitudinous details of a business like that of the American Fur Company, covering half the area of the United States, it is not surprising that it should appear in different lights from different points of view. One may search in vain in the correspondence of Astor or Crooks for

²"Meek was evidently very poor. He had scarcely clothing enough to cover his body. And while talking with us the frosty winds which sucked up the valley made him shiver like an aspen leaf. He reverted to his destitute situation and complained of the injustice of his former employers; the little remuneration he had received for the toils and dangers he had endured on their account, etc.; a complaint which I had heard from every trapper whom I had met on my journey." *Travels in the Great Western Prairies*, T. J. Farnham, 1839, p. 69. This is a fair sample of the complaints which came from nearly all the old employes of the company.

any evidence of irregular methods. The conduct of affairs at the home office, however vigorous and aggressive it might be, was always strictly within the law. Very different was it at the other end of the line, where the business came in contact with the lawless element of the wilderness. Thus, while McKenzie was making preparations to establish a distillery at Fort Union whereby he would be able to evade the Federal statutes, Crooks was writing to Chouteau strongly deprecating his course, and urging the agents of the company to stand upon higher ground. "It is enough," he said, "that our laws prohibit the introduction of ardent spirits into the Indian country, and it is our bounden duty to conform honestly thereto." The St. Louis house had a more difficult rôle to fill, for it was midway between New York and the wilderness — between the law-abiding management of the company's affairs and the law-defying agents at the distant posts. One does not need to scan very closely the correspondence of the Western Department at St. Louis to see that it had one code of business when looking toward the east and quite a different one when looking in the other direction.

Owing to the great power of the American Fur Company it was opposed by all other traders. It had no allies. An "opposition company" was one opposed to the American Fur Company. However much the smaller traders might fight among themselves, there was one enemy against whom they made common cause — one flag under which all could rally. The opposition to the company was, it is true, more numerous than formidable, and considering their uniform experience of failure, the number of competitors is at first thought surprising. A great part of the opposition to the company was a species of blackmail. It was a common thing for employes who had been trained in its service until they had acquired some knowledge of the fur trade, to quit their employment and set up for themselves. Sometimes they did this from personal spite, because they had a grievance against the company, and at others because they actu-

ally felt that they might meet with some success. Occasionally the more experienced would enlist eastern capital in their enterprises and would themselves ascend the river as agent or principal in the business. As a general thing, however, these smaller concerns, like minor political parties, had no real expectation of accomplishing anything by themselves, but hoped, by embarrassing their powerful competitor, to force it to buy them out or to make profitable concessions to them. To this end they would ascend the river and settle down near some important outpost of the company and ply their skill to the utmost to debauch the Indians and secure their trade. Not having any character to defend they were reckless of measures. They could easily smuggle through the small quantities of liquor they wanted, and were often better equipped at particular points with this decisive weapon of trade than were their opponents. These irresponsible traders were in fact an unmitigated nuisance in the Indian trade. They were not powerful enough to stand the least chance of crippling their adversary, any more than summer flies can cripple the horse which they annoy, but they could and did succeed in causing it infinite embarrassment, and its whole career was one prolonged effort to exterminate the myriad pests that were always swarming about it.

Notwithstanding the discreditable motives which lay behind most of these adventurers the sympathy of the public was always with them. The great company was looked upon as an oppressive monopoly, resolved to crush whatever lay in its way, and its acts were judged by a stricter standard than were those of its less powerful rivals. The government inspectors were as a rule more severe with it, perhaps from sympathy with the smaller traders, but probably because they could more easily detect its shortcomings.

The attitude of the company toward these competitors was always severe and merciless, for, knowing their character and motives, it held them in the utmost contempt. As a general thing it fought them with their own methods until it had won all the trade away from them, when they would

find themselves stranded and helpless and would sue for mercy. Others of the more respectable class it would buy out, receiving them again into the service. With still others who were really powerful rivals, like the Columbia Fur Company, it formed coalitions on advantageous terms to the company absorbed. In one way or another it held the field against all competitors and only retired at last when its work was done and a new order of things had come over the field of its extensive operations.³

For the rest, the company's affairs were conducted on the same principles which control in the business world today. It knew perfectly well the power of political influence, and no railroad corporation of modern times is more assiduous in the lobby than was the American Fur Company in the Departments at Washington. More than once it escaped exclusion from the Indian country where a more obscure party would have had no show whatever. The company also understood to perfection the value of favors to those who were in a position to help or injure it. Free passes were provided on its steamboats; scientific enterprises were generously promoted, and every thing was done that would redound to its praise or credit. It may indeed be said that the history of the company upon the upper Missouri was uniformly on the side of the advancement of knowledge and its assistance to enterprises of this character was of permanent value. But to the average individual the American Fur Company was the personification of monopoly, determined to rule or ruin, and hence it was thoroughly hated even by those who respected its power.⁴

³ It was with reference to these competing traders that Chouteau on one occasion issued the following instructions to John P. Cabanne at Council Bluffs: "*Si vous ne croyez pouvoir vous débarrasser d'eux par la force des armes, il vaut mieux faire un arrangement en leur donant tel poste que vous jugez le plus convenable à nos intérêts.*" And the faithful lieutenant returned the following comfortable assurance to his chief: "*Sois sans inquiétude. Rien ne sera négligé pour faire mordre la poussière à notre incapable adversaire, et tout ce qui dépendra de moi sera mis en usage pour y parvenir.*"

⁴ The following testimonial by an Indian agent, uttered at about the

It is scarcely necessary to observe that a business concern of the magnitude and importance of the American Fur Company must needs have had many men of high ability connected with it. Astor, the founder of the company, whose biography has been given in another place, stands at the front rank of commercial geniuses of this or any other age. The Chouteaus of St. Louis were considered in their day among the ablest business men of the country, and there is no other name so intimately connected with the growth and development of the metropolis of the Mississippi valley. Ramsay Crooks, Robert Stuart, Kenneth McKenzie, Alexander Culbertson, D. D. Mitchell, and many others were men who were charged with high responsibilities, and would today stand near the top in the world of business.

The strongest man, next to Mr. Astor himself, who at any time stood at the helm, in the home office at New York, was RAMSAY CROOKS, who rose to the presidency of the company. He was born in Greenock, Scotland, January 2nd, 1787. He came to America at the age of sixteen, and at once entered the service of the Montreal fur traders. He went to Mackinaw as clerk to Robert Dickson, and the next year pushed his way on to St. Louis, where he entered the trade of the Missouri. As early as 1807 he became associated with Robert McLellan, with whom he continued in business until the two entered the Pacific Fur Company in 1811. After Crooks' return from the Pacific in 1813, he drops out of sight for the next few years, but he was evidently associated in some capacity with Mr. Astor. In 1817 he appears as agent of the American Fur Company, which had just bought out the Southwest Company. During this period he displayed the most extraordinary energy in his work, and for many years made the long and arduous annual journey

time that the American Fur Company was permanently retiring from business, shows that it had not risen in popular estimation: "This old American Fur Company is the most corrupt institution ever tolerated in our country. They have involved the government in their speculations and schemes; they have enslaved the Indians; kept them in ignorance; taken from them year after year their pitiful earnings, etc."

to Mackinaw and even to St. Louis. Crooks was the virtual head of the company's business during the twelve years after the Western Department was established in St. Louis. When Mr. Astor sold out his interest in the company in 1834, Crooks purchased the Northern Department, which then took the company name, and soon after became its president. Crooks lived to the age of seventy-two and died in New York June 6, 1859. He became related through marriage to the Chouteau family, having married Emily Pratt, March 1, 1825.

Crooks was the letter writer of the American Fur Company; not merely because his correspondence was voluminous, but because in character and quality it was far above that of the average trader. It was strong and vigorous, like the nature of the man behind it. It abounded in interesting matter, of great value historically, and his letters constitute our best fund of information on many points connected with these early events. Some of these letters are unsurpassed as examples of clear and incisive writing.

Crooks was always open and above board in his dealings, yet a vigorous and relentless enemy when he took up a contest. He opposed clandestine, quite as much as open, violations of the law. In all his career connected with a business where the temptation to use lawless methods was so great, there is no record of any attempt on his part to do anything that he had not a legal right to do.

Although a man of great energy and longevity he was not a strong man physically. The record of his work shows that he was in ill health a great deal of the time, and it is a matter of surprise that so much of an invalid could accomplish such a quantity of work.

The principal character in the Western Department of the American Fur Company was PIERRE CHOUTEAU, JR., of St. Louis, grandson of Auguste Chouteau, one of the founders of the city, and himself the most illustrious scion of the distinguished Chouteau family. He was born in St. Louis, January 19, 1789, and by his own people was known as

Pierre Cadet Chouteau. He was bred in the atmosphere of the fur trade, and early showed a marked aptitude for business, becoming clerk to his father before he had reached the age of sixteen. In 1806 he accompanied Julien Du Buque to the lead mines of the upper Mississippi, and in 1809 went with his father up the Missouri in the service of the Missouri Fur Company. Soon after reaching his majority he went into business on his own account, and in 1813 formed a partnership with B. Berthold, which continued until 1831. He was a member of the firm of Bernard Pratte and Company, which secured the agency of the Western Department of the American Fur Company; and a leading member of the firm of Pratte, Chouteau and Company, which purchased the Western Department in 1834. Four years later the firm name was changed to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, which remained the name for more than twenty years.

As his business expanded, Chouteau was drawn into other fields, and for many years resided mainly in New York, where he was interested in railroads and other industrial enterprises. He was at this time one of the leading financiers in that home of financial men.

Chouteau died in St. Louis, October 6, 1865.

One has only to read the correspondence of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., to understand that he was a man of more than ordinary business ability. A born merchant, he possessed to a marked degree the rare quality of turning to pecuniary profit whatever he touched. These natural abilities he supplemented by the most industrious and persevering methods. In a business which stretched over a million square miles he carried out the details with the greatest exactness and understood the needs of the most remote posts as if he had been there. He personally made two extensive steamboat trips to the upper river and thus further familiarized himself with the wants of the trade. His solicitude extended to the minutest particulars. It is said that whenever the company's annual boat was about to leave port for the upper river he always visited the Captain on the boat, went over everything

in detail, cautioned him about trusting to the Indians, and enjoined him under no circumstances to take unnecessary risks.

Chouteau, like every successful man, adapted his methods to conditions as he found them. He made no attempt to introduce a higher standard of business morality in the trade than it was accustomed to. He stood solidly behind his agents on the upper river in the questionable measures which the exigencies of competition frequently obliged them to resort to. In short his code of business morals was sufficiently elastic to fit the situation with which he had to deal.

Strict and severe in the discipline of his business, he was nevertheless generous and fair to all who served him well. His most trusted steamboat masters he would permit, without loss of salary, to take service with other boats after their return from the annual trip until the company again required their services: but let one of them have the temerity to set up in trade for himself where the company was doing business and the whole enginery of that leviathan concern would be used to crush him.

Chouteau was liberal toward scientific expeditions seeking to go up the country, and he contributed in no small degree to their success. His house was always open to people of this class. He took a deep personal interest in their researches, and himself gathered an extensive collection of Indian curios.

In the course of his long business career an immense mass of correspondence had accumulated, and although this was long before the era of typewriters, and to some extent before that of the common letter press, copies of everything were laboriously preserved even where they had to be transcribed by hand. All the letters received were carefully briefed and bound together in neat packages, in which form they have come down to the present time, and constitute our most valuable original data upon the history of the American fur trade.

King of the "U. M. O." in its palmy days was KENNETH

McKENZIE, the ablest trader that the American Fur Company ever possessed. He was born of distinguished parentage in Rosshire, Inverness, Scotland, in 1801. He was a relative of Alexander Mackenzie, who made the first journey across the continent ever made by white men north of the Spanish possessions. Kenneth came to America early in life and entered the service of the British Fur Companies. Almost nothing is known of him during this period, but it is probable that he lost his position as did so many others when the two British companies consolidated in 1821. He joined Joseph Renville in forming the Columbia Fur Company, of which he was President at the time of its union with the American Fur Company in 1827. McKenzie was placed in control of the American Fur Company's interests upon the upper Missouri and with Laidlaw and Lamont formed the sub-department called the Upper Missouri Outfit. To McKenzie fell the responsible task of carrying the trade into those hostile regions from which the traders had always hitherto been driven. He was very ambitious and entered this new field with great enthusiasm and untiring energy. Within four years he had occupied the entire theatre of trade with posts at the mouth of the Yellowstone, the Big-horn, and the Marias. The noted post of Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, the best built and the most commodiously-equipped post west of the Mississippi, was McKenzie's creation. He was successful in his work, but allowed his zeal to lead him into a *faux pas* which ended his usefulness in the upper country. This was the erection of a distillery at Fort Union for the purpose of evading the laws of the United States. The detection of this subterfuge brought wide-spread odium upon the company, seriously threatened its charter, and forced McKenzie to retire for a time from the country. He visited Europe, and after his return went again to Fort Union, but did not long remain there. He closed up his affairs with the American Fur Company with about fifty thousand dollars to his credit. He then established himself in the wholesale liquor trade,

but was not successful, and with his habits of lavish hospitality soon spent the greater part of his fortune. He died in St. Louis April 26, 1861.

McKenzie was eminently fitted for the particular calling which fortune assigned him. Of distinguished birth, he always carried himself as one born to command. His discipline was severe, and he had little regard for human life when it stood in his way. He once offered to surrender to the merciless savages a man who had killed one of their number. At another time, when news came of an Indian attack upon a party of hunters, he was heard to inquire if the horses had been saved. On hearing that they had all been lost and that only the men had escaped, he exclaimed: "D—n the men! If the horses had been saved it would have amounted to something!" No one about Fort Union ever doubted his ability; no one but dreaded his authority. He affected a kind of state⁵ in his business, generally wearing a uniform, and permitting only a select few at his table. Toward his guests he was lavishly hospitable, and in him as an entertainer the best traditions of British Fur Companies found expression. He was fond of manly sports, and his particular delight was to engage in buffalo hunts with the fine horses which he kept especially trained for the purpose. He took much interest in the country around him, and made an extensive collection of specimens and curios illustrating its remarkable features.

From his headquarters at Fort Union, McKenzie ruled over an extent of country greater than that of many a notable empire in history. His outposts were hundreds of miles away. His parties of trappers roamed far and wide through the fastnesses of the mountains. From every direction tribes of roving Indians came to his post to trade. Alto-

⁵ "Imagine my surprise, on entering Mr. Campbell's room, to find myself in the presence of Mr. McKenzie, who was at that time considered the king of the Missouri and, from the style in which he was dressed, I really thought he was a king." Larpenteur's first acquaintance with McKenzie. *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, p. 65.

gether it was a remarkable business that he followed, and one which only a man of great ability could have handled so successfully. He was universally feared and respected even by the turbulent spirits of the mountains, while his immediate subordinates in charge of the various posts considered him not merely their superior but a friend. His correspondence with them shows diplomatic skill of no mean order, and he could with equal facility praise well doing, administer mild censure in a way to rob it of all bitterness, or bear down with merciless weight upon him who deserved it.

McKenzie had a fair education and the extensive correspondence which has come down to us is extremely well written. It discloses an active mind which looked beyond the mere details of trade and took an intelligent interest in the affairs of the world.

McKenzie married late in life and left two children, daughters, who are still (1900) living. He also had a son by an Indian wife. The name of this son was Owen McKenzie. He was given a good education and became a man of considerable prominence in the upper Missouri trade. He was killed by Malcolm Clark in 1863.

WILLIAM LAIDLAW, next to Kenneth McKenzie, was the ablest of the traders who came to the Missouri with the Columbia Fur Company. To him was assigned Fort Tecumseh, which later became Fort Pierre, the largest and most important post except Fort Union. He was of Scotch descent, trained in the service of the British Fur Companies, and thoroughly versed in the business of the fur trade. He was a severe master, and his tyrannical temper often made him unpopular. A great lover of hunting he spent much time in the buffalo chase. Like McKenzie he was a good letter writer and evidently was considered a valuable man. He was well off when he retired from the business. He built a house near Liberty, Missouri, where he kept open door to his friends as long as his money lasted. He died a poor man.

ALEXANDER CULBERTSON, who ranked with McKenzie and Laidlaw in the Missouri fur trade, had not risen to prominence until about the close of the period which this sketch embraces. He was of Scotch-Irish parentage and was born in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in May, 1809. He lived with his parents on their farm until 1826 when he accompanied his uncle, John Culbertson, to Florida, and was there during the Indian War. He entered the American Fur Company service in 1829. He rose steadily and became the company's most important man when McKenzie and Laidlaw retired. For a long while he was at the head of Fort Union and for a time also of Fort John on the Laramie. He built Fort Alexander on the Yellowstone near the mouth of the Bighorn.

Culbertson was a popular trader and lacked the arbitrary manner characteristic of McKenzie and Laidlaw. He was about six feet high, of strong presence, a keen eye and a frank and open countenance. He married a woman of the Blackfoot nation who became well known in the history of the upper Missouri. She died only a few years ago. Their children were all well educated and became responsible business men and women. Culbertson died August 27, 1879, at Orleans, Missouri. He was well off financially when he retired from the fur trade.

DAVID D. MITCHELL (born in Louisa County, Va., July 31, 1806; died in St. Louis, Mo., May 31, 1861,) had a long and honorable career in the fur trade, first as a clerk and then as a partner in the Upper Missouri Outfit. He was the builder of Fort McKenzie in 1832. He became United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Central Division, with headquarters at St. Louis, September 20, 1841, and held the position at intervals until 1852. He entered the volunteer service during the war with Mexico and was Lieutenant-Colonel of a Missouri regiment raised by Sterling Price. He served with Col. Doniphan during the war, and commanded the detachment that captured Chihuahua.

HONORE PICOTTE came to the Missouri with the Columbia

Fur Company, but after its union with the American Fur Company he joined with others in forming the French Fur Company, which in turn sold out to the American Fur Company in 1830. Picotte then entered the service of the Upper Missouri Outfit where he remained for some twenty years. He became a partner and finally rose to an influential standing in the company's affairs. His name constantly appears in the correspondence of the times, but his history, except in the immediate connection of the fur trade, is obscure.

JAMES ARCHDALE HAMILTON, who served for a long time at Fort Union, and had charge of that post during McKenzie's absence from July 26, 1834, to November 17, 1835, was an able man over whose personality an air of mystery hung which time has not cleared up. He is said to have been an English nobleman by the name of Archibald Palmer⁶ who through some difficulty had been obliged to leave his native land. He came to America under an assumed name and in some way or other became acquainted with Kenneth McKenzie who took him to Fort Union as book-keeper. He was well educated and proved himself very useful, as may be inferred from the fact that he was placed in charge of the post during the absence of McKenzie. His correspondence during this time shows him to have been thoroughly conversant with the duties of the post. His name is of frequent occurrence in the literature and correspondence of the period. In the midst of the rough life of the wilderness he held himself aloof from its vices, was reticent in his manner, extremely punctilious in his dress which he obtained from London, and always hated the Indians. He was hospitable and companionable in spite of his eccentric and exclusive ways. He is said to have died at St. Louis in the service of the American Fur Company.

JAMES KIPP was a well-known character in the early fur trade and came to the Missouri with the Columbia Fur Company in 1822. He was in a sense the founder of Fort Clark in that he established a post in that vicinity from which Fort

⁶Larpeur, in *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, p. 84.

Clark evolved in the course of a few years. In 1831 Kipp went to the Marias and built Fort Piegan, the first post in the Blackfoot territory. In 1833-34 he was in charge of Fort Clark. Very little is known of his life except that he had a long and varied career in the Missouri fur trade.

DANIEL LAMONT was one of the three partners of the "U. M. O." and one of the original Columbia Fur Company men. He had a long career in the fur trade, but very little is known of his life. He is supposed to belong to the Scottish family of Lamont who originated in Argyleshire, Scotland, and whose clan history is known back to the year 1200. Daniel was the most common name in the family. One of the Lamonts, also named Daniel, settled in New York State in 1818. He was grandfather of the Hon. Daniel S. Lamont, Secretary of War under President Cleveland. Another branch of the family migrated to Canada at an early date, and it is supposed that the Missouri trader belonged to this branch.

The SARPY family was long connected with the St. Louis fur trade. John B. was born January 12, 1798, and died April 1, 1857. His father, Gregoire Berald Sarpy, is said to have been the first man to attempt the navigation of the Missouri with keelboats. Sarpy commenced his career as a clerk to some of the St. Louis traders and rose to a partnership in the American Fur Company, in whose affairs he bore a part second only to that of Chouteau. Two posts were named after him—*John*, on the Laramie, and *Sarpy*, on the Yellowstone.

THOMAS L. SARPY, a brother of John B., was a clerk in the service of the American Fur Company when he met a tragic death, January 19, 1832, at the post of the Ogalallah Indians. On the evening of that day after a busy day's work at trading, he was putting away the robes which had been taken in. An assistant was handing them over a counter on which a lighted candle sat. A spark from the candle, it is supposed, was blown by the gusts caused in handling the robes, into a fifty-pound keg of powder which sat uncovered just behind

the counter. In the explosion that followed, the building was completely demolished and Sarpy was instantly killed, his body being mutilated beyond all recognition. The other two men in the room were not seriously injured and the property was nearly all recovered.

PETER A. SARPY was a clerk of the American Fur Company for several years in charge of the post near Bellevue.

LUCIEN FONTENELLE was one of the best examples of the Rocky mountain "partisan," the leader of a "brigade," or itinerant party of hunters and trappers. There was, moreover, an element of romance in his life which has no parallel in the history of the fur trade. It is said that he was of royal lineage. His father and mother, François and Marieonise, came from Marseilles, France, to New Orleans, where Lucien and a sister, Amelia, were born, about 1807. The parents, some years afterwards, lost their lives in a flood caused by a hurricane, but the children, being away at school, escaped. At about the age of fifteen Lucien engaged as clerk in a banking house, but, becoming incensed at an act of harsh treatment by his aunt with whom he lived, he ran away and was not seen again for twenty years. In the meanwhile he went to St. Louis, engaged in the fur trade, and at length became a leader of the mountain expeditions of the American Fur Company. At this time he was a partner of Andrew Drips, with whom he built a post at Bellevue, a few miles below the present city of Omaha. In 1835 Fontenelle went into partnership with Fitzpatrick, Sublette and Bridger, and it is said that in the following year he committed suicide at Fort Laramie.

After Fontenelle's sister Amelia had grown up she married wealth and position and led a life of high social distinction in New Orleans. Her brother, whom she supposed dead, was only a memory. One day there called at her house a man of rough appearance, dark, browned and swarthy with years of wilderness life, in whose face there was not now left a trace of its former lineaments. His sister refused to receive him. His old nurse who still lived was

called in and identified him by a flesh mark on his foot. But the aristocratic sister did not take kindly to her unpolished, long-lost brother and he soon went back to Bellevue.

Fontenelle was married by Father De Smet to an Omaha woman. He had four children who lived to adult years and some of them achieved prominence in the history of the state of Nebraska.

ANDREW DRIPS was another of the famous trio of mountaineers — Fontenelle, Drips, and Vanderburgh — and, although older than either of his associates, survived them both many years. Comparatively little is known of his biography. He was born in Westmoreland County, Pa., in 1789, and died in Kansas City, Mo., September 1, 1860. Our first notice of him is in 1820 when he was associated with a fur trader by the name of Perkins. He was later a member of the Missouri Fur Company with Pilcher. Soon after the American Fur Company entered the mountain trade, Drips became associated with Vanderburgh in charge of the mountain expeditions. He continued in this business for many years. In 1842 he was appointed by President Tyler, agent for the tribes of the upper Missouri and held the office for four years. He was an active and efficient agent. After the expiration of this duty he returned to the employment of the American Fur Company.

Drips' principal establishment, while in the mountain trade, was at Bellevue a little above the mouth of the Platte and here he married a woman of the Oto nation. By her he had several children. His fourth child, a daughter, was born in Pierre's Hole on the day of the famous battle there with the Grosventre Indians, July 18, 1832. She is still living⁷ and possesses the papers of her distinguished father. These are preserved in a small fur-covered trunk which Major Drips carried with him on his expeditions. They form a very complete history of the events on the Missouri during the period when Major Drips was Indian Agent.

WILLIAM HENRY VANDERBURGH, clerk and partisan of

⁷ Mrs. William Mulkey of Kansas City, Mo.

the American Fur Company, was a chivalrous and daring leader. He was born in Vincennes, Ind., probably about 1798, although there is authority for fixing the date at 1792. He was the son of Henry Vanderburgh who did service in the Revolutionary War as captain in the Fifth New York Regiment, and was subsequently appointed by President Adams, Judge of the Indiana territory. Young Vanderburgh was educated at West Point, having entered that institution in 1817. He could not long have remained in the government service, for as early as 1823 he had achieved distinction as a trader and was associated with Joshua Pilcher in the Missouri Fur Company. He was present at the battle with the Aricara Indians in August of that year and held the nominal rank of Captain by appointment of Colonel Leavenworth. After leaving the service of the Missouri Fur Company he entered that of the American Fur Company as a partisan in charge of the mountain expeditions. The events of his career in the mountains, so far as known, are related in the regular course of our narrative, while the circumstances of his tragic death form the subject of a separate chapter.⁸

JACOB HALSEY, clerk and partner in the "U. M. O.," served mainly at Forts Pierre and Union. He kept the journal at Pierre and on one occasion varied its monotony by introducing an interesting dissertation upon the Mandan and Aricara Indians. He was a valuable man, but given to hard drink, which eventually ruined his constitution. In 1837 he had the smallpox at Fort Union. Late in the summer of 1842, while on a visit at Laidlaw's home, near Liberty, Missouri, he became intoxicated and in this condition rode on horseback at a rapid gait along a road through some woods. His head struck one of the trees and he was instantly killed.

JOSEPH A. SIRE was prominently identified with the trans-

⁸ See Part IV., Chapter III. The data for this sketch were furnished in part by Mrs. Francis N. Davis, of Sioux City, Iowa, who is a descendant of the Vanderburgh family.

portation business of the American Fur Company on the early steamboats. For many years he was master of the annual boat, and one of the most interesting documents of those times which still survive, is a log book in which he kept a record of his trips. It was kept in French and is a precious relic of a phase of Western life now gone forever. Later he became admitted to an interest in the company. Sire was born at La Rochelle, France, February 19, 1799; came to America at the age of fifteen; established himself in Philadelphia until 1836 when he went to St. Louis where he remained the rest of his life. He died July 15, 1854.

CHARLES LARPENTEUR was an engagé and clerk of the American Fur Company and otherwise employed in the country along the Missouri for more than thirty years. His importance in the present connection is rather that of historian than trader. In the latter vocation he was a failure, but he followed the practice of keeping a daily journal which he later worked over into an autobiography. This, by a stroke of rare good fortune, found its way to the world through the editorship of Dr. Elliott Coues, and with the editorial⁹ notes is a valuable contribution to the history of the times.

Larpenteur was born in Fontainebleau, France, in 1803; came to America with his parents in 1813; went to St. Louis and at the age of twenty-one entered the fur trade. In 1833 he went to the mountains in the employ of Sublette and Campbell. In the following summer he made his way to the mouth of the Yellowstone where he remained at Fort William until Sublette and Campbell sold out to the American Fur Company, when he entered McKenzie's service at Fort Union. His life thereafter was of the most diversified character and he was engaged in a variety of callings, all of

⁹ *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, the Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-72*, edited, with many critical notes, by Elliott Coues. *Maps, Views, and Portraits*. In Two Volumes. New York, Francis P. Harper, 1898.

which terminated unsuccessfully. He died a disappointed man, November 15, 1872.

WARREN ANGUS FERRIS is another of the American Fur Company men whose interest to us arises solely from his literary work. He was born at Glens Falls, N. Y., December 20, 1810; was educated as a civil engineer; in 1830 entered the American Fur Company service as clerk, and remained with them until 1835, wandering over a vast section of the West; subsequently he moved to Texas where he lived in the practice of his profession until his death, which took place at Reinhardt, near Dallas, February 8, 1873.

Ferris' career in the Rocky mountains embraced the most interesting period of the fur trade. He followed the practice of keeping a journal and this in later years he worked up into a series of articles entitled *Life in the Rocky Mountains* which were published in the *Western Literary Messenger* of Buffalo, N. Y. It abounds in valuable data relating to the fur trade and is our sole authority on a number of points. It contains for example the first written description by an eye-witness of the geysers of the Yellowstone. The death of Henry Vanderburgh, the building of Fort Bonneville, the massacre of Etienne Provost's party by the Snakes, the origin of several important geographical names, and numerous other historic matters find their best authority in Ferris. His style is, unfortunately, laborious to a degree, and either he or his editor made a woful mix-up of the matter of dates. While the work is now of great historic value we can quite appreciate the causes which led the readers of the *Western Literary Messenger* to beseech the editor to give them no more of it.¹⁰

¹⁰ I am indebted to Mr. O. D. Wheeler, of St. Paul, for the data on Ferris' life, and the public are even more indebted to him for unearthing this historic treasure, which has remained buried in oblivion from the time it was published until the fall of 1900, when Mr. Wheeler discovered it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTAIN BONNEVILLE.

Bonneville a history-made man — Biographical sketch — Development of Bonneville's scheme — Organization of his expedition — Progress to Green river — Fort Bonneville — Winter quarters on Salmon river — Dispositions for the winter — Spring hunt on Malade river — Bonneville and Wyeth — Green river rendezvous of 1833 — Meager returns — Plans for ensuing year — Purpose of the Walker expedition — I. R. Walker — Zenas Leonard — Alfred K. Stephens — Leonard with Sinclair's free trappers join Milton Sublette — Composition of Walker's party — The expedition starts — Massacre of the Digger Indians — Peril in crossing the Sierras — Discovery of Yosemite — Reach the Pacific — Party sets out for home — The return route — Second massacre of Digger Indians — Arrival at rendezvous on Bear river — Review of the expedition — Captain Bonneville in the Crow country — The Captain abandons the Crow country — Arrangements for the winter of 1833-4 — Captain Bonneville makes an expedition to the Columbia — Reception at Fort Walla Walla — Return to winter quarters of his party — Annual rendezvous in Bear river valley — Gloomy prospects — Second expedition to the Columbia — Return to Snake river — Winter quarters on Bear river — Rendezvous of 1835 on Wind river — Return to the States — Biographical notes — Review of Captain Bonneville's enterprise — A business failure — Scientific accomplishment nothing — Bonneville's maps — Bonneville as a leader of an expedition — Bonneville takes wagons to Green river — Bonneville's breach of discipline — Bonneville and Irving — Criticism of Bancroft.

THE adventures of Captain Bonneville in the Rocky mountains from 1832 to 1835 have attained a prominence in the history of the West to which they are not entitled. They and their hero are an apt illustration of Diedrich Knickerbocker's profound idea of the power of history to rescue men and events from the "wide-spread, insatiable maw of oblivion." Captain Bonneville, so far as his work in the Rocky mountains is concerned, is a history-

made man. Irving's popular work, which in later editions bears Captain Bonneville's name, is not in reality so much a record of that officer's adventures, as it is of all the transactions of a period in which the business of the fur trade in the Rocky mountains was at its height. Scarcely a third of the work has to do exclusively with Bonneville, but around this theme as a nucleus are gathered the events of the most interesting era of the fur trade, until the central figure in the narrative is encased in a frame more costly and attractive than the picture itself.¹

Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville was born in France, April 14, 1796. His father, a well-educated man, and a publisher, who had actively discussed the questions of the day through his pamphlets, fell under the displeasure of the government and was imprisoned. Upon his release he sought permission to sail for America, but it was refused him. He contrived, however, to send Mme. Bonneville and her son Benjamin with Thomas Paine, who, likewise find-

¹The authorities here relied upon are the following: *The Rocky Mountains, or Scenes, Incidents and Adventures in the Far West; Digested from the Journal of Captain B. L. E. Bonneville of the Army of the United States, and Illustrated from Various Other Sources.* Washington Irving.

Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard, a native of Clearfield County, Pa., who spent five years in trapping for furs, trading with the Indians in the Rocky Mountains, written by himself: Printed and Published by D. W. Moore, Clearfield, Pa., 1839. This exceedingly rare work was recently discovered by Mr. Horace Kephart, Librarian of the Mercantile Library in St. Louis. It is almost *unique* as only three or four copies are known to exist. Its chief value is the new light which it throws upon the Walker Expedition, under Bonneville's direction in 1833-34. Unfortunately Leonard's inaccuracy in matters where there are other authorities to check him, detracts from the value of his narrative in this case.

The Journal and Letters of N. J. Wyeth, the works of Townsend and others who crossed the plains while Bonneville was there; the correspondence of the American Fur Company, and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company—all furnish valuable hints as to Bonneville's operations. There are a few letters of Bonneville still extant, but his journals which Irving used appear to be lost.

Life in the Rocky Mountains, by W. A. Ferris.

ing France a good country to be out of at this time, secretly sailed for America. Upon their arrival in the United States the Bonneville family went to live for a time with Paine at New Rochelle. Through Paine's influence Benjamin secured a cadetship at West Point where he graduated in 1819. On the occasion of Lafayette's visit to America in 1825 he showed so much interest in the Bonneville family that the young officer was detailed to accompany him as aide on his tour of the States. When Lafayette returned to France he took Bonneville with him and the latter remained for some years an inmate of the Lafayette home. On his return to America he was assigned to duty on the western frontier, and there became deluded with the idea that there was a fortune for him in the fur trade. He began casting about for an opportunity to gratify this new ambition and the result was his famous expedition of 1832-5.

Whether the prime mover in this enterprise was Bonneville himself, or certain business men in New York who wanted to enter the fur trade and thought the Captain a good man to conduct an expedition, does not appear. Bonneville secured a leave of absence from August, 1831, to October, 1833, with permission to spend it in the unexplored regions of the Far West. The letter from the War Department, granting this leave, states that it was "for the purpose of carrying into execution your design of exploring the country to the Rocky mountains and beyond, with a view to ascertaining the nature and character of the several tribes inhabiting those regions; the trade which might be profitably carried on with them; the quality of the soil, the productions, the minerals, the natural history, the climate, the geography and topography, as well as the geology of the various parts of the country." To these general purposes the Department added another — that of securing special information as to the Indian tribes, their numbers, methods of making war, their condition, equipment, alliances, etc. Captain Bonneville's expedition was to be of no expense to the United States.

This "design" of Captain Bonneville furnishes a clue to the arguments which he presented as the basis of his application for a leave of absence. It is certain, however, that whatever may have been his representations to the Department, the primary object of his enterprise was trade. The entire record of his work, so far as it has been preserved to us, proves this.

Bonneville entered into arrangements with Alfred Seton, of New York, one of the old Astorians, by which Seton and some associates were to provide the funds for a mountain expedition and Bonneville was to conduct its operations in the field. In carrying out this program the Captain organized a party of one hundred and ten men with two principal assistants, Mr. I. R. Walker, later of California renown, and Mr. M. S. Cerré, a member of a family well known in the fur trade of the West. A fine assortment of goods was provided and the equipment was in all respects a splendid one. Wagons were used on the expedition, contrary to the practice of the mountain traders generally. There were twenty of these vehicles drawn by oxen and mules. The whole organization was on the basis of strict military discipline, and to all outward appearances the enterprise promised to make a very formidable showing in the mountain trade.

The story of Bonneville's adventures has been told by Washington Irving in a more interesting way than it is likely ever to be told again. All that will be given here will be, as in the case of Astoria, a condensed sketch of the enterprise with such additional light as has been discovered since Irving wrote, together with an estimate of the value of Captain Bonneville's work as a part of the history of the West.

The final organization of the expedition took place at Fort Osage, ten miles from Independence, and the start from this point was made on the 1st of May, 1832. The journey to the mountains passed off without notable incident. Bonneville conducted his party on true military principles, so far as protection against the Indians was concerned, and he was

evidently esteemed an excellent "partisan." The route was the usual one up the valleys of the Platte and Sweetwater rivers through South Pass and thence to Green river, where he arrived about noon on the 27th of July. The day before he was passed by an American Fur Company party under the well-known leader, Fontenelle. Both parties were much too late for the annual rendezvous in Pierre's Hole, which had already taken place some two weeks before. Bonneville and Fontenelle struck Green river nearly due west of South Pass at the mouth of Piney Creek, a tributary from the west. Bonneville calls this stream Grand Encampment creek, very likely from the circumstance of two large parties having gone into camp there. In a short time both parties moved farther up stream and established camps. Here the Captain proceeded to erect a trading post with the evident purpose of making a permanent establishment. The spot selected was on the west shore of the river, five miles above the mouth of Horse creek. The site was an ideal one, and the Captain erected the typical post, with palisade walls and flanking bastions at two diagonal corners. This was the post known in the history of the west as "Fort Bonneville," or "Bonneville's Old Fort," but the trappers called it "Fort Nonsense," or "Bonneville's Folly," from the fact that no use was ever made of it.²

The truth is that Bonneville found out, after the work was well under way, what he should have ascertained before it was begun, that, however suitable the upper valley of Green river might be for a summer rendezvous, it was no place for a permanent post; for the altitude was so high and the winter climate so severe, that Indians and trappers alike left it during the winter season. For his approaching winter quarters therefore he determined to seek a more hospitable climate, and, from such information as he could obtain, he fixed upon the headwaters of Salmon river as the most eligible spot. His stock not yet being all recuperated, he detached a small party under one Mathieu to pasture them for

² See List of Posts, Appendix F.

a time on the banks of Bear river with instructions to join him at winter quarters before the season of snow set in.

Bonneville himself set out for Jackson and Pierre's Hole on the 22nd of August. In Jackson Hole he found the unburied remains of two men, More and Foy, who had been murdered there by the Blackfeet just about a month before. The Captain passed by and examined the old battle field of Pierre's Hole and saw the gruesome evidences of the conflict which had lately taken place there. The site for the winter's camping ground on the Salmon river was reached on the 26th of September and the erection of winter quarters was at once begun. This location was on the west bank of the river, three miles below the Forks (mouth of the Lemhi) in a grove of cottonwoods. According to Ferris, who saw it about a month later and who was naturally an unfriendly critic of an opposition trader, it was a "miserable establishment," consisting of "several log cabins, low, badly constructed, and admirably situated for besiegers only who would be sheltered on every side by timber, brush, etc." The latitude of the place, as determined by Captain Bonneville, was N 45 degrees, 51 minutes, 24 seconds, nearly fifty miles too far north.

While the preparations for winter quarters were going on, Captain Bonneville dispatched three parties of hunters in various directions and retained only twenty men with himself. The autumn hunt wore away without incident of note, except the Captain's interesting intercourse with the Nez Perce Indians. Gradually the hunters returned, nearly all of them having had encounters of a more or less disastrous nature with the Blackfeet. The camp now became crowded, not only with the people belonging to the company, but with numerous bands of the Nez Perce, Flathead and Pend d'Oreille Indians. The large herds of horses ate up the pasturage while the game resources of the immediate neighborhood were by no means adequate to the wants of the multitude that had to be fed. Captain Bonneville accordingly detached about fifty men to hunt and trap on

Snake river with orders to join him on Horse creek in the Green river valley in the following July. The Indians soon moved in search of better feed, and the Captain, after sufficient delay to enable him secretly to cache his surplus goods, followed in their wake on the 20th of November. He soon overtook the Indians in their new camping ground and remained there until the 9th of December, when the whole party moved to a new location—a snug retreat in the mountains on Lemhi Fork of Salmon river, where they remained until the festive Christmas season took place.

On the 26th of December, with thirteen hunters well armed and mounted, Captain Bonneville set out in search of Mathieu, who had been detached at Green river to recuperate his horses in Bear river valley, and whose failure to appear began to cause serious apprehension. The Captain's route lay up the Lemhi river, thence through John Day Defile or Pass to John Day (now Little Lost) river; thence to Godin river, now called Big Lost river; thence across the lava plains, passing the base of the westernmost of the Three Buttes; and finally, after great danger and hardship from the severe cold weather, the party reached the Snake river near the mouth of the Portneuf, January 12, 1833. Here they soon fell in with some of Mathieu's party, and on the 3rd of February were joined by that leader himself. Mathieu had had bad luck for he had lately been surprised by the Indians and had lost three of his men.

After a residence of three weeks in Mathieu's encampment, Captain Bonneville set out, February 19, with sixteen men for the caches on Salmon river, leaving as many more men on Snake river. The Captain's party made the journey in safety and without noteworthy incident, and about the middle of March arrived at the caches, which were found untouched.

After having taken such articles as he was in need of, Captain Bonneville prepared for his spring hunt. He dispatched Cerré and Hodgkiss, the clerk, with an assortment of goods to trade with the neighboring Indians, with instruc-

tions to join him at the Salmon river caches on June 15th. For himself and the rest of the party, numbering about twenty, he had selected the valley of the Malade river as the field of operations. He arrived in the valley of Godin river about the 1st of April and here determined to pause a short time, it being a good muskrat country, when, to his great annoyance, he fell upon the trail of a party of whites who had recently passed that way in the same direction that he himself was going. So certain was it that the Captain had on his hands a rival band of trappers that he not only detached two spies to ascertain their movements, but set forward at full speed to reach the trapping ground as soon as possible. Upon meeting the returning spies it was learned that Milton G. Sublette and J. B. Gervais, partners in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, themselves able and experienced mountaineers, with a party of twenty-one trained men, were en route for the very hunting ground selected by Captain Bonneville for his spring hunt. This news well-nigh took the life out of the Captain's movement, but for the present he hung close upon the skirts of his adversaries. The snow was still so deep that neither party could cross the divide between Godin river and the Malade, and they had to wait where they were until the 25th of April. The month of May was spent by the rival parties on the headwaters of the Malade, and although Captain Bonneville's historian has considerably passed over the details of the hunt, it is evident that its results were not altogether satisfactory.

Early in June the Captain set out for the Salmon river rendezvous, where he arrived safely on the 15th and met by appointment his other parties. The caches were safe and the party having been re-equipped, set out to find Hodgkiss, who had been left with the Nez Perces on the Snake river plain. He was found on the 24th of June. At the place of meeting, which was about sixteen miles from Henry Fork of Snake river, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, who was on his way East, and was traveling in company with Mr. Ermatinger

and party of the Hudson Bay Company, overtook the Captain. The British trader being at the time short of supplies, Captain Bonneville thought the opportunity a good one to do the trading with the Indians himself. He accordingly opened his goods, but not an Indian would touch the tempting bait. The trader's control of them was perfect, and the Captain was completely disconcerted.

While at this camp Wyeth proposed to Captain Bonneville a joint hunt in the country to the southwest as far as to the mountains of California. The Captain accepted the proposition, but subsequently the plan fell through, and he left for Green river on the 6th of July. No incident of moment happened on the journey, and his party arrived at rendezvous on the 13th of July.³

The Captain was now at the end of his first year in the mountains and was about to take stock of the results of his enterprise thus far. The party of fifty whom he had detached to work up the country to the south and west had fallen in with Milton Sublette and Gervais, and their time had been frittered away in useless contention with their rivals. A trader (probably Montero by name) had been sent the year before to make a fall hunt in the Crow country with instructions to come to the Salmon river wintering ground upon its completion. He had not been seen since until at the present rendezvous where Captain Bonneville heard for the first time the woful tale of his misfortunes. While in the Crow country with a village of that tribe, he was relieved of nearly all his property — horses, traps, merchandise — by those polite freebooters, who even seduced most of his men to desert and remain in their own camp. With the few who remained faithful he sought the protection of the new Fort Cass at the mouth of the Big-horn and remained in its vicinity during the winter. But he found that he had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. His men were constantly stealing away to the fort

³ The dates of Wyeth's journal for his own departure and arrival are July 7th and July 15th.

with all the furs they could get hold of and trading them for liquor. The American Fur Company was undoubtedly back of this faithless behavior as well as the previous conduct of the Crows, among whom they had active and unscrupulous agents.

Early in the spring the luckless trader set out to try his fortune on the headwaters of Powder river. It happened that about this time the Aricara Indians, that ever treacherous and hostile tribe, had located on the Platte river, and were making the whole country round about unsafe to any but large parties. That very spring a party under Bridger and Fraeb and another under a well-known free trapper by the name of Harris had lost their horses at the hands of these Indians. Soon after leaving Fort Cass a war party of Aricaras were found to be hovering about Montero's camp and in the course of a few days succeeded in capturing all his horses. In doing this they undertook to allay suspicions by sending two of their warriors on a friendly mission to camp while the rest should drive off the horses. The trappers, suspecting something, seized the two Indians, but not in time to save the horses. Negotiations then ensued for the ransom of the prisoners. The trappers refused to give them up except upon a restoration of all the horses, and threatened to burn the captives if this were not done. The Indians left their companions to the mercy of their captors, who, true to their threat, consigned them to the flames. This unlucky event completed the ruin of the partisan and he turned up at rendezvous with only himself, and thankful for that much.

Putting everything together Captain Bonneville did not have as a result of a year's work of his party of over one hundred men more than about twenty-three packs of beaver, or less than twenty skins to the man for his party. That would scarcely pay the wages of his men.⁴

⁴"Messrs. Bonneville & Co. 22½ packs. Few goods, few horses, and poor Capt. Cerry [Cerré] goes home. B. remains."—Wyeth *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 70.

"Bonneville, seeing that he is nearly gone, plays the devil with us.

Captain Bonneville remained at rendezvous twelve days doing what he could to keep up his end with the Rocky Mountain and American Fur Companies, who were encamped in the neighborhood. In making his arrangements for the ensuing year his principal move was to be, according to his own representation, as recorded by Irving, a thorough exploration of Great Salt Lake and the country around it. This work he entrusted to his principal assistant, Mr. I. R. Walker. For the purpose of conveying his meager returns to the states he delegated his second assistant, Mr. M. S. Cerré, who was to follow the river route in company with the parties of Campbell and Wyeth. For himself he decided to remain and inaugurate a fall hunt in the Crow country, notwithstanding that his leave of absence would expire in the following October.

A shadow of doubt will always attach to the statement of motives which actuated Captain Bonneville in regard to this expedition. According to Irving it was one of the Captain's cherished schemes "to have the [Great Salt] lake properly explored, and all its secrets revealed; and while it was one in which his imagination evidently took a leading part, he believed that it would be attended with great profit, from the numerous beaver streams with which the lake must be fringed." His instructions to Walker, who was charged

He offers to common hands \$350 to \$1,000 per annum, knowing that when the time is up, he will pay them with wind. Many of the men that I have brought out, having received so large an allowance in St. Louis, have left me. I will use every effort to get them back. Bonneville has 23 packs of beaver, principally obtained from trappers indebted to the American Fur Company, and Fontenelle and Drips. He is out of goods and can get no supply this year. I am in hopes we shall get clear of him. . . . If he continues as he has done, \$80,000 will not save him. Sublette's company are doing well. They have none but hired men and can not be put down by competition." Letter from Fontenelle to McKenzie, written at Green river rendezvous two days before Bonneville's departure.

"It is conceded that Bonneville, out of all his grand expedition will have only enough to pay the wages of his men." Chouteau to Astor, September 25, 1833.

with the expedition, and "in whose experience and ability he had great confidence," were "to keep along the shores of the lake, and trap in all the streams along his route." For this purpose Walker was given a party of forty men and Captain Bonneville's resources were taxed to the utmost to supply a complete equipment. The expedition was to be absent for a year and was to meet in the following summer at the appointed place of rendezvous in Bear river valley.

Such is the unequivocal statement of Captain Bonneville, as reported by Irving, in regard to the motives of his so-called Salt Lake expedition. It constitutes the sole evidence that the exploration of Great Salt Lake was any part of the Captain's scheme. Everything else goes to show that his plan was to send an expedition to California and that the Salt Lake project was wholly an afterthought. Already only two weeks before Captain Bonneville had agreed to an arrangement with Wyeth for exactly such an expedition, but for some reason it had fallen through, probably because the Captain preferred to conduct it entirely with his own resources and not place himself in any way in the hands of the energetic New Englander. Three men who were members of the party, Walker himself, George Nidiver, and Zenas Leonard, afterwards wrote up their recollections of the expedition. All of them speak of it as being from the first intended to go to California. Leonard for example says that Walker "was ordered to steer through an unknown country toward the Pacific, and if he did not find beaver he should return to the Great Salt Lake in the following summer. . . . I was anxious to go to the coast of the Pacific, and for that purpose hired with Mr. Walker as clerk for a certain sum per year." Nidiver says (Bancroft, vol. XX., p. 41, n. 14): "In the spring [of 1833] there were a large number of trappers gathered at the rendezvous in Green river valley, and among them Captain Walker and company bound for California. We joined him, making in all a party of thirty-six."

Such is the direct evidence of those who went on the expedition. The circumstantial proof is equally convincing. If Captain Bonneville's instructions were to hold to the shore of Great Salt Lake, carrying on the joint purposes of exploration and trapping, why did he supply the party for a year and put off a meeting with them until the following summer? The remotest point on Great Salt Lake was scarcely two hundred miles from rendezvous, and this Captain Bonneville knew very well at the time. If this ambitious explorer were really so absorbed in his desire to learn all about the Great Salt Lake, how happened it that he remained three years in the country and passed repeatedly within fifty or a hundred miles of the lake but never went to see it? Explorers do not ordinarily explore in that way.

The truth is Captain Bonneville sent out a trapping expedition to go through to California. The information derived from Wyeth had convinced him that there was every prospect of success in that direction. He had no thoughts of exploration except as a mere incident to the main purpose. Not an instrument of any kind for taking observations did he provide with the elaborate equipment. It was beaver fur, not geographical knowledge, that he was after. His entire sinews of war were supplied by those who were looking for profits. They had not equipped him for an exploring tour, and his experience during the past year had warned him that he must bestir himself more vigorously if he was to meet the expectations of his backers. That the Captain deliberately planned an expensive exploring tour is therefore not to be supposed. Irving himself gives a hint of the real motive of the expedition in his reference to its unfortunate outcome. "The failure of the expedition," he says, "was a blow to his [Bonneville's] pride, and a still greater blow to his purse." It was principally a blow to his purse, for surely his pride ought to have been more gratified by what the Walker party actually did in the line of exploration than what it would have accomplished had it remained on the borders of Great Salt Lake.

Having premised this much upon the scope and purpose of this expedition it is in order to follow the party upon its adventurous path to and from the Pacific. Walker, the leader, was a proper man for that sort of work. He had had a long and varied experience in the Santa Fe and Missouri trade. He understood the Indians well, loved the hardships of wilderness life and was particularly fond of adventure in new and untried fields. In later years he became a conspicuous character in California history.

Zenas Leonard, Mr. Walker's clerk, whose connection with the expedition has only recently come to light, is now our most circumstantial authority upon its history. He was a native of Clearfield county, Pennsylvania, and like many another youth, sought to try his fortune in the unexplored regions beyond the Mississippi. He left his native state in the spring of 1831, and having engaged in the service of Gant and Blackwell of St. Louis, left that city on April 24th with a party of seventy men on an expedition to the mountains. The route was the usual one by way of the Platte river, although at that time it was not much traveled. The party arrived at the Forks of the Platte on the 1st, and at Laramie river on the 27th, of August. Here they commenced their fall trapping campaign. Leonard joined a party of twenty-one men under Alfred K. Stephens, whose immediate field of labor was along the valley of the Laramie. The party lost all their horses during the winter and then undertook to go to Santa Fe where Stephens had been before. They made an ineffectual attempt to penetrate the mountains and finally, on the 20th of April, 1832, they started for the mouth of the Laramie, where the several divisions of their company were to meet in the spring. None of the other parties, however, put in an appearance, and Stephens and his men were still waiting when Sublette and Fitzpatrick came along with the caravan bound for the annual rendezvous in Pierre's Hole. The little band, discouraged and forlorn, got to quarreling among themselves, and finally abandoned further effort to hunt inde-

pendently and hired out to Fitzpatrick. Stephens sold his furs to Fitzpatrick, and they were cached near the Laramie pending Sublette's return from the rendezvous.

The whole party then went on to the rendezvous in Pierre's Hole and Leonard participated in the battle with the Blackfeet on the 18th of July. A day or two afterward Stephens and Fitzpatrick quarreled about the terms of their bargain on the Laramie. Stephens, considering himself treated unfairly, hired four men and started back to seize the furs before Sublette, who had not yet recovered from his wound in the late battle, could overtake them. In the valley of Jackson Hole this little party and seven men of Wyeth's expedition who were returning home, were attacked by the Blackfeet. Two men were killed and Stephens was severely wounded. He returned to Pierre's Hole, where he remained until July 30, when he set out for home with the party of Wm. L. Sublette. He died the same day and was buried near the trail in the southeast extremity of Pierre's Hole.⁵

Leonard and one Saunders joined the party of fifteen free trappers who went with Milton Sublette to the southwest from Pierre's Hole for the fall hunt of 1832. They wandered over an immense stretch of territory, nearly to the sources of the Owyhee river in northern Nevada, and then made their way back to the neighborhood of Great Salt Lake. From this locality they moved east to the Crow country and thence southwest to the Platte at the mouth of the Laramie. Here they found a letter from Gant detailing a catalogue of misfortunes which effectually disposed of any further hope of business in that quarter. Leonard and Saunders, becoming discouraged, resolved to go to the Green river rendezvous of 1833, then about to assemble. Arrived there they fell in with Walker and engaged for the California expedition. Such were some of the experiences of the

⁵At Stephen's request "a few minutes before his death" Sublette took back to St. Louis 86 pounds beaver and 7 pounds castorum belonging to Stephens. The receipt for this property is still in existence in the possession of M. L. Gray of St. Louis.

man who is fairly entitled to be called the historian of the Walker expedition to California in 1833.

Walker's party, consisting of forty men,⁶ left Green river July 24, 1833. They went directly to the valley of Great Salt Lake, where they stopped to lay in their final supply of buffalo meat. The last buffalo was killed August 4th, and three days later the party bade farewell to the lake at its western extremity and "took a westerly course into the most extensive and barren plains I have ever seen." (Leonard.) Wending their painful way through the Salt Lake desert they finally reached the Humboldt river, to which they gave the name Barren, because "the country, natives, and everything belonging to it justly deserve the name." On the 4th of October they arrived at the sinks of the Humboldt, and here there transpired an event which has cast a lasting odium upon the expedition.

While following down the course of the Humboldt parties of the Pai-ute or Digger Indians were encountered—a forlorn and impoverished race, generally inoffensive and friendly to the whites. But from some not very patent cause they incurred the enmity of Walker's men. It may have been their thefts—both Irving's and Leonard's accounts say as much—and this racial weakness of the Indian tribes makes it easy to believe so—but it is more probable that these reckless trappers, far away from even wilderness law, and among Indians whom they saw that they could insult with impunity, were inclined to treat them much as they would prowling and pilfering wolves.

Their earlier experiences with these Indians are thus related by Leonard: "We continued traveling down the river, now and then catching a few beaver. But as we continued extending our acquaintance with the natives, they began to practice their national failing of stealing. So eager were they to possess themselves of our traps that we

⁶ According to Leonard there must have been nearly sixty in the party. Probably the forty were all Bonneville's men, but others joined the expedition.

were forced to quit trapping in this vicinity and make for some other quarter. The great annoyance we sustained in this greatly displeased some of our men, and they were for taking vengeance before we left the country — but this was not the disposition of Captain Walker. These discontents being out hunting one day, fell in with a few Indians, two or three of whom they killed and then returned to camp, not daring to let the Captain know it. The next day while out hunting they repeated the same violation, but this time were not so successful, for the Captain found it out, and immediately took measures for its effectual suppression.”

Upon arriving at the Humboldt Lakes it was found that the Indians were about in great numbers and it was feared that trouble was brewing. Finally one day matters came to a head in the following summary fashion: “A little before sunset, on taking a view of the surrounding waste with a spy glass, we discovered smoke issuing from the high grass in every direction. This was sufficient to convince us that we were in the midst of a large body of Indians, but as we could see no timber to go to, we concluded that it would be as well to remain in our present situation and defend ourselves as well as we could. We readily guessed that these Indians were in arms to avenge the death of those our men had killed up the river, and if they could succeed in getting any advantage over us, we had no expectation that they would give us any quarter. Our first care, therefore, was to secure our horses, which we did by fastening them all together and then hitching them to pickets driven into the ground. This done, we commenced constructing something for our own safety. The lake was immediately in our rear, and piling up all our baggage in front, we had quite a substantial breastwork — which would have been as impregnable to the Indian arrows as were the cotton bales to the British bullets at New Orleans in 1815.

“But before we had got everything completed the Indians issued from their hiding place in the grass, to the number,

as near as I could guess, of eight or nine hundred, and marched straight toward us, dancing and singing in the greatest glee. When within about one hundred and fifty yards of us they all sat down on the ground and dispatched five of their chiefs to inquire whether they might come in and smoke with us. This request Captain Walker very prudently refused, as they evidently had no good intentions, but told them that he was willing to meet them half way between the breastwork and where their people were sitting. This appeared to displease them very much, and they went back not the least bit pleased with the reception they had met with.

“After the five deputies related the result of their visit to their constituents, a part of them rose and signed to us that they were coming to our camp. At this ten or twelve of our men mounted the breastwork and signed to them that if they advanced a step farther it would be at the peril of their lives. They wanted to know in what way we would do it. Our guns were exhibited as the weapons of death. This they seemed to discredit and only laughed at us. Then they wanted to see what effect our guns would have on some ducks that were swimming in the lake near the shore. We fired at the ducks, thinking in this way to strike terror into the savages and drive them away. The ducks were killed, which astonished the Indians a good deal, but not so much as the noise of the guns — which caused them to fall flat to the ground. After this they put up a beaver skin on a bank for us to shoot at for their gratification, when they left us for the night. This night we stationed a strong guard, but no Indians made their appearance, and we were permitted to pass the night in pleasant dreams.

“Early in the morning we resumed our journey along the lakes, without seeing any signs of Indians until after sunrise, when we discovered them issuing from the high grass in front, rear, and on either side of us. This caused great alarm among our men at first, as we thought that they had surrounded us on purpose; but it appeared that we had only

happened among them, and they were as much frightened as we. From this we turned our course from the border of the lake into the plain. We had not traveled far when the Indians began to move after us — first in small numbers, but presently in large companies. They did not approach near until we had traveled in this way for several hours, when they began to send small parties in advance, who would solicit us most earnestly to stop and smoke with them. After they had repeated this several times we began to understand their motive — which was to detain us in order to let their whole force come up and surround us, or to get into close quarters with us, when their bows and arrows would be as fatal and more effective than fire-arms.

“We now began to be a little stern with them, and gave them to understand that if they continued to trouble us they would do it at their own risk. In this manner we were teased until a party of eighty or one hundred came forward who appeared more saucy and bold than any others. This greatly excited Captain Walker, who was naturally of a very cool temperament, and he gave orders for the charge, saying that there was nothing equal to a good start in such a case.

“This was sufficient. A number of our men had never been engaged in any fighting with the Indians, and were anxious to try their skill. When our commander gave his consent to chastise these Indians and give them an idea of our strength, thirty-two of us dismounted and prepared ourselves to give a severe blow. We tied our extra horses to some shrubs and left them with the main body of the company, and then selecting each a choice steed, mounted and surrounded this party of Indians. We closed in on them and fired, leaving thirty-nine dead on the field, which was nearly the half. The remainder were overwhelmed with dismay, running into the high grass in every direction, howling in the most lamentable manner. Captain Walker then gave orders to some of the men to take the bows and arrows of the fallen Indians and put the wounded out of misery.

“The severity with which we dealt with these Indians may be revolting to the heart of the philanthropist; but the circumstances of the case altogether atone for the cruelty. It must be borne in mind that we were far removed from any succor in case we were surrounded, and that the country we were in was swarming with hostile savages, sufficiently numerous to devour us. Our object was to strike a decisive blow. This we did, even to a greater extent than we had intended.”⁷

It will be seen without much difficulty from the foregoing narrative that this atrocious act was largely the result of a guilty conscience. The thefts of the traps had been punished by the slaughter of several of the natives and the presence of so many of their people so soon afterward very reasonably excited alarm lest they were bent on revenge. With any other tribe of Indians this would have been the case, and the men can hardly be blamed for feeling very much concerned about their own safety. There was certainly more excuse for their last act than for those which led to it.

This was not the end of the trouble with these poor Indians. A week later when the party were involved in the mountain labyrinths and were seeking a way across the Sierra, Captain Walker, Nidiver, and Leonard were out together exploring for a pass. While thus engaged the following scene transpired, as related by Leonard: “Nidiver was separated from us when two Indians made their appearance, but as soon as they saw us, they took flight and ran directly towards Nidiver, who, at once supposing that they had been committing some mischief with us, and as they were running one behind the other, killed them both at one shot. After this unpleasant circumstance we went back to our horses and thence to camp. Mr. Nidiver was very sorry when he discovered what he had done.”

It was October 10th, according to Leonard, when the party left Battle Lakes and undertook to cross the moun-

⁷ “The lakes have been named Battle Lakes.” Leonard.

tains. The task proved one of great difficulty and terrible suffering. Provisions became entirely exhausted. Twenty-four horses were lost on the mountains, seventeen of them being used for food. The party found no game at all until they reached the other side. The first food of any account procured was a basket of acorns which a frightened Indian let drop when he saw the party. This was October 25th.

From Leonard's account, when the party arrived at the verge of the Sierra they found it so steep as to be impossible of descent in most places and they were forced to explore for a long while before they found a practicable route. On the first day of their search they killed a small deer, "the first game larger than a rabbit we had killed since the 4th of August, when we killed our last buffalo near the Great Salt Lake." That day the party had to let their horses down by ropes over a long slope of loose rocks, which they accomplished in time for their evening camp. The hunters came in after dark with two large black-tailed deer and a black bear. The famine was over, the redwood and balsam of the sunny slopes of the mountains had taken the place of the snow-covered tops of the Sierras, and in the far distance the eye ranged over a vast plain, which, as they thought, sank away into the bosom of the Pacific.

The party reached the foot of the main range on October 30th. In the course of the next few days they passed certain natural features which, to one familiar with that region, might lead to an identification of their route. Soon after leaving the base of the mountains they passed "some trees of the redwood species, incredibly large, some of which would measure from sixteen to eighteen fathoms around the trunk at the height of a man's head above the ground." Soon afterward they fell upon a river whose course they followed for a considerable distance. "Its bed lay very deep, forming very high banks even in smooth and level parts of the country; but where there are rocks its appearance is beyond doubt the most remarkable of any other water course. In some places the rocks are piled up per-

pendicular to such a height that a man on top, viewed from the bed of the river, does not look larger than a small child. From the appearance of that precipice it is not exaggerating to state that they may be found from a quarter to half a mile high, and many of them no wider at the top than at the bottom." May this have been the first visit of Americans to the far-famed Yosemite?⁸

On the night of November 12th (Leonard) occurred the meteoric shower of 1833, and it caused great terror to some of the more superstitious of the party; but Captain Walker, with the versatility of Columbus when the magnetic needle went wrong, explained it all away for them. Early the next morning they came to where the tide rose and fell and soon reached a bay, which was of course that of San Francisco. They did not long remain here but set out in a southern direction and on the 20th caught sight of the broad Pacific.

It is not intended to follow in detail the doings of the party during the ensuing winter, for that properly belongs to the history of California with which we are not at present concerned. Suffice it to say that the day after their arrival at the Pacific they met the Boston ship *Ladoga*, Captain Bradshaw (or as Leonard calls him, Baggsshaw), and were hospitably entertained by him. Captain Bradshaw received the furs which they had caught on their way across the mountains and paid for them in provisions.

The winter slipped away quickly in the enticing sunny climate of California, while the bull fights, horse races, and occasional hunts made the whole experience a very paradise compared with the rugged life of a beaver trapper in the heart of the Rocky mountains. We may well imagine that it was with some reluctance that the party, upon the approach of spring, turned their faces again toward the inhospitable region where they had endured so much hardship. In fact six of their number, all of them mechanics,

⁸ It is said that Walker requested that the epitaph on his tombstone record the fact that he discovered the Yosemite wonderland.

remained, "with the determination of making a permanent residence in the country, and never again returning to the States"; while the rest of them "lazily left our camp for the East." The returning party numbered, according to Leonard, fifty-two men, with three hundred and sixty-five horses, forty-seven beef and thirty dogs, together with an outfit of provisions. The departure was on the 14th of February, 1834.

The return route lay at first up the San Joaquin valley. The progress of the party was very leisurely and just before starting to cross the southern end of the Sierras, they hired two Indian guides under whose leadership they made the passage in safety, though with some difficulty. The guides were dismissed on the 1st day of March.

From this point the party turned north, keeping well into the foothills of the mountains, where they could secure water, intending to hold this direction until they should reach the outgoing trail of the preceding year. Once, however, they undertook to strike directly across the desert to the east and thus shorten the journey, but after traveling two days without water and being reduced to the most desperate straits, they returned to the mountains and continued north, or even northwest, until they reached their old trail south of the Battle Lakes.

While passing the neighborhood of the lakes they fell in with apparently the same band of Indians with whom they had dealt so severely on the way out. "All along our route from the mountains thus far," says Leonard, "we had seen a great number of Indians, but now when we had reached the vicinity of the place where we had had the skirmish with the savages when going to the coast, they appeared to rise in double the numbers that they did at that time, and as we were then compelled to fight them, we saw by their movements now that this would be the only course to pursue. We had used every endeavor that we could think of to reconcile and make them friendly but all to no purpose. We had given them one present after another, made them

all the strongest manifestations of a desire for peace on our part, by promising to do battle against their enemies, if required, and we found that our own safety and comfort demanded that they should be severely chastised for provoking us to such a measure. Now that we were a good deal aggravated some of our men said hard things about what they would do if we should again come in contact with these provoking Indians; and our Captain was afraid that, if once engaged, the passions of his men would become so wild that he could not call them off while there was an Indian left to be slaughtered.

“Being thus compelled to fight, as we thought, in a good cause and in self-defense, we drew up in battle array and fell on the Indians in the wildest and most ferocious manner we could, which struck dismay throughout the whole crowd, killing fourteen, besides wounding a great many more, as we rode right over them. Our men were soon called off, only three of whom were slightly wounded.

“This decisive stroke appeared to give the Indians every satisfaction they desired, as we were afterwards permitted to pass through their country without molestation.”

The party retraced their route along the Humboldt, but instead of passing over to the Great Salt Lake, went north to the Snake river and thence made their way to the appointed rendezvous on Bear river, where they arrived about June 1st. It was not until the 20th of the month that Captain Bonneville put in an appearance.⁹

The Walker California Expedition was a great disappointment to Bonneville, and he has attributed its failure to

⁹ Joseph Meek (see Mrs. Victor's *River of the West*) says that the party after leaving southern California crossed to the Colorado of the West, and in the country to the east of that stream fell in with the party of Henry Fraeb whose regular hunting ground was in the Colorado mountains. The united parties wandered over a great deal of country, including the valley of the Gila and North and Middle Parks of Colorado, winding up at the Green river rendezvous of 1834. If this prodigious journey were actually taken, and it may have been, it was only by a detachment of Walker's party and probably included none of Bonneville's men.

a disobedience of orders. In this he was not only unjust, but actually misrepresented the affair. The evidence is overwhelming that the expedition left Green river with the full and primary expectation of going to the Pacific. Had they come back successful, so far as their hunt was concerned, and had they not sullied the expedition with such revolting barbarity toward the Indians, there is no doubt that Captain Bonneville would have been entirely satisfied. Concerning the slaughter of so many of the Indians, a partial explanation has already been given. These Indians were of a harmless, destitute character, but no doubt very troublesome, as most Indians are, from their thieving propensities. Being little qualified for active resistance the trappers were more careless of their treatment of them, and some of the more reckless ones punished the thieves with summary death. Later when such great numbers surrounded them on the shores of Humboldt Lake, they naturally surmised that revenge was their purpose, and this led to the killing of so many at this point. On their return the following year, they of course had still more reason to fear a spirit of revenge, and so they again sought safety by a desperate blow which should strike terror into the Indians. Their plan for getting rid of their troublesome guests was certainly most successful, but the blood of these fifty or more Indians will always remain a blot upon the record of this otherwise romantic expedition.¹⁰

That portion of the route to which most interest attaches, from a geographical point of view, lies beyond the Humboldt Lakes. To the eastward the course of the Humboldt river marks the line of their journey. But just where it passed over the Sierras is a matter of speculation. It may be inferred from the similarity of description to natural features, that the party came down from the mountains on the head of Merced river, California. That they entered the Sierras to the southwest of the Humboldt Lakes seems

¹⁰ Zenas Leonard's further service in the Indian country was mainly among the Crows. He left for the East with Bonneville in 1835.

almost certain from the fact that on their return in the following year along the east slope of the mountains they joined the last year's trail some days before they reached the lakes. This they could not have done if the trail had led directly west or northwest from the lake. The neighborhood of Sonora Pass seems as likely as any to have been the approximate point of passage.

The expedition is of interest as being the second American trapping expedition that made its way from the neighborhood of Great Salt Lake to California. Jedediah S. Smith had already made the trip across the Sierras, probably a little to the south of the point where Walker crossed it.

Returning to Captain Bonneville we find that he left the Green river rendezvous of 1833 on July 25th, with his full party, and traveled by way of South Pass, the headwaters of the Sweetwater, and the Popo Agie to the Bighorn river. Campbell's party joined him near the head of the Bighorn. Fitzpatrick was with Campbell and was looking for a place for his fall hunt. Captain Stuart, of the British army, and Nathaniel J. Wyeth, of Boston, were also with him. Captain Bonneville, fearing that Fitzpatrick intended to forestall him in the approaching hunt, secretly detached a small trapping party and fixed a place for their rendezvous late in August, in the Medicine Lodge valley. A second party was likewise detached at the second cañon of the Bighorn. When the point was reached where the various parties who were going to St. Louis were to embark, all set to work on the construction of bullboats. Upon their completion Wyeth and Milton Sublette put off together; Campbell took charge of his own boats; and Cerré with thirty-six men and three boats conveyed the property of Captain Bonneville.

The Captain on the 17th of August set out for his rendezvous on the Medicine Lodge. Here he met the two detached parties who came in on the 29th, each with a tale of misfortune to relate. They had both fallen in with marauding parties of Indians and had lost a goodly number of horses and traps. As the neighborhood in which the

Captain then was seemed to be infested with Indians, he broke camp on the 1st of September and went over into the Wind river valley. Here he left his party, while he with three men went to get some needed articles, particularly traps, from the Green river caches. The Captain undertook to ascend Wind river and cross the range directly into the Green river valley. But he evidently struck into the mountains before he arrived near the head of the river, and he soon found himself in that entanglement of mountain peaks, snow drifts and impassable chasms where the principal source of Green river is to be found, and he was utterly baffled in his attempts to get through. Forced to beat a retreat, he swung around to the southwest, rounded the Wind river range by way of South Pass, and arrived at the old place of rendezvous on the 17th of September.

The Captain immediately set out on his return the following morning, and having good reason to believe that his little party was being shadowed by a band of Blackfeet, he moved with the greatest celerity and circumspection. His route lay north across what is now Union Pass, and he rejoined his party in the Wind river valley on the 24th. The Captain found that the footsteps of his parties in the Wind river valley had been persistently dogged by a band of Crows who made no effort to commit violence, but were evidently bent on robbery whenever opportunity should offer. The truth is that the emissaries of Kenneth McKenzie were everywhere present in the Crow country this fall. They succeeded in getting the Crows to rob Fitzpatrick of all he possessed, and they were trying to do the same thing with Captain Bonneville. The Captain concluded that the Crow country was no place for him at that time, and so he pulled up stakes and started for Green river. Moving by way of South Pass he arrived at the caches on the 14th of October.

Having raised his caches the Captain proceeded down the valley on the west side of Green river and arrived at Ham's Fork on the 26th of October. He then passed over to the

Bear river valley and reached the outlet of Bear lake on the 6th of November. On the 10th he visited the celebrated Beer Springs, as they were then called, or the Soda Springs of the present day. With three men he now took temporary leave of his party, appointing a place of rendezvous on Snake river, and set out on the 11th of November in quest of the fur trappers whom he had detached under Hodgkiss in the previous spring. Without notable incident, except the meeting of a band of friendly Bannocks, he found the trappers on the 20th of November, ensconced in the bosom of a mountain valley. The united party now returned to Snake river, where they met the party which had been left on Bear river. As this was the 4th of December immediate preparations were made to go into winter quarters in the valley of the Portneuf river.

Having completed his arrangements for a winter camp, and being satisfied that he was in a neighborhood of friendly Indians, Captain Bonneville determined to leave his people to their own devices during the winter, while he, with a few men, would make an exploring tour to the Columbia to study the trade prospects in that direction and would return the following March. Accordingly he set out with three men Christmas morning, 1833. Their route lay down the left bank of the Snake, generally at some little distance back from the river. On the 12th of January they arrived at Powder river, Oregon, and here would better have attempted to cross straight to the Columbia, as Hunt and the Astorians had done twenty-three years before. But instead they toiled over the mountains through which the Snake cuts its way, and after great hardship and peril, and many interesting encounters with the local tribes, they reached the Hudson Bay post on the Columbia, near the mouth of Walla Walla river, March 4, 1834.

The Captain had been encouraged, while sojourning among the Snake river tribes, to believe that there was a good opening for American trade on the Columbia. The Indians received him well and he determined to make the

attempt. But his experience at Fort Walla Walla was far less encouraging. Although his reception was most hospitable, yet when he came to ask for supplies he was given to understand that it was contrary to the policy of the Hudson Bay Company to outfit competing traders in any way. As the Captain was wholly without supplies, he was compelled to relinquish instantly his plan of descending the Columbia, and to beat a precipitate retreat from the country. He was so much piqued at this action of Mr. Pambrun, the Hudson Bay factor, that he declined to accompany a party under one of the British traders, a Mr. Payette, who was going by a safe route across the mountains to convey provisions to some of their trappers in the upper Snake valley. The Captain and party set off by themselves on the 6th of March and made their way with much difficulty across the Blue mountains. They reached the winter camp on the Portneuf on the 12th of May. It was not, however, until the 1st of June that the whole party was reunited.

Two days were given up to general festivities when the party set out for the rendezvous in Bear river valley which was fixed at a point near where the river crosses the present state line between Wyoming and Utah. They reached the rendezvous without any other incident than a harmless encounter with the Blackfeet and an hilarious dissipation at the Soda Springs. They found Walker and his California party already waiting for them.

Soon after their arrival, Cerré came in from the States with the annual supplies. The customary carousal ensued and several days were given up to a good time. Walker's party were the heroes of the occasion. Their long and perilous journey across the mountains, their fights with the Indians, their glorious winter in the sunny clime of the Pacific, captivated the imaginations of the trappers and the whole company would instantly have joined any party bound for that far off country. Very different were the feelings of Captain Bonneville. If the returns of his first year's work in the mountains had been insufficient to pay

expenses, those of the second year were such as to threaten instant collapse of the enterprise. His own parties had done but little, while Walker, on whom he had chiefly relied, came back empty-handed. He thus found himself with only ten to fifteen packs of beaver to send back to the States — not nearly enough to pay the wages of his men.¹¹

In spite of the gloomy prospect Captain Bonneville decided to try another year in the mountains. Walker and Cerré were dispatched to the States with the slender returns of the year. A party was sent to the Crow country under one Montero to make the fall hunt in that section and eastward to the Black Hills, when they were to go to the Arkansas for the winter. The Captain himself had resolved upon another expedition to the Columbia.

Captain Bonneville took up his march on the 3rd of July with a party of twenty-three men. On the 10th he met a company of Hudson Bay trappers and succeeded with alcohol and honey in making the leader ingloriously drunk. He here learned that Nathaniel J. Wyeth had returned from the States and was bound for the Columbia to establish a business there. The Captain, not wishing to have a rival band along with him, made haste to cache his goods and get away; but unforeseen delays detained him until Wyeth came up. After another series of hospitalities and a general buffalo hunt, the Captain finally got off and wended his course down the Snake river, leaving Mr. Wyeth to build a post which he proposed to establish on the Portneuf. Nothing worthy of note occurred on the trip except the dangers caused by an extensive conflagration which envel-

¹¹ "The latter [Bonneville & Co.] I think by next year will be at an end with the mountains. They have sent down from twelve to fourteen packs of beaver, and admitting that it should sell at a high price, it is not enough to pay their returning hands." Fontenelle to Chouteau September 17, 1834.

"At the camp [on Twin Creek about 17 miles east of Bear river] we found Mr. Cerry and Mr. Walker who were returning to St. Louis with the furs collected by Mr. Bonneville's company, about 10 packs, and men going down to whom there is due \$10,000." Wyeth — *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 225.

oped the entire country in the neighborhood of the Grande Ronde. When the Captain arrived within thirty miles of Fort Walla Walla he thought to repeat his experiment of the winter before by sending a party to the post in quest of provisions. This second attempt was no more successful than the first, and as the Captain's party were well nigh out of provisions it was necessary to bestir themselves with vigor. They reached the Columbia about fifty miles below the Walla Walla and started down stream, but found that the influence of the Hudson Bay Company was everywhere supreme, and that they were liable to be literally starved out of the country. His various delays among the Indian tribes had now brought him so well along in the season that he must adopt the most energetic measures or winter would hem him in within an enemy's land and leave him at their mercy.

Making a virtue of necessity he set his face toward the east and on the 1st of October arrived at the base of the Blue mountains. Recent rains had extinguished the summer fires but there was so little game that the hunters could scarcely provide for the company. An untoward accident caused them to lose their way and spend three days buffeting around among the mountains, and it was not until the 30th of October that they arrived at the Snake river. When they reached the Portneuf they met two messengers from Montero's party who had come for additional supplies and to let the Captain know that they would spend the winter in the Crow country instead of going to the Arkansas, and would join him in the spring wherever he might appoint. The Captain took the messengers along with him to the caches on Bear river, where they arrived on the 17th of November, gave them the necessary articles, and sent them on their way with orders to meet him at the forks of Wind river in the latter part of June following. The Captain himself spent the winter in the upper end of Bear river valley. Buffalo were plenty and abundance reigned in camp, and with the interesting society of Indian bands and the occasional visit

of some white trappers, the winter wore away in ideal hunter's fashion.

When spring opened the Captain collected all his property in Bear river valley, and on the 1st of April, 1835, proceeded by way of Ham's Fork to the valley of Green river. Just where he went during the spring is not certain, but the 10th of June found him "a little to the east of the Wind river mountains." He reached the place of rendezvous at the forks of Wind river about the 22nd of June. A few days later Montero joined him after a fairly successful campaign and at this place the united parties celebrated the 4th of July. Montero was then detached to continue his operations in the Crow country, while the Captain himself, with the rest of his party, set out for the settlements. He arrived there on the 22nd of August, 1835, and the mountains at last, in the words of Fontenelle, "were clear of him."¹²

¹² Bonneville's leave of absence having long expired before his return, he had been dropped from the rolls of the army. There was a very proper opposition among army officers to his reinstatement, and he would have been excluded altogether but for President Jackson, who reinstated him as a reward for his contributions to geographical knowledge of the country. In his subsequent career Bonneville served at various posts on the frontier, at Carlisle, Pa., and in the Seminole and Mexican Wars, being wounded in the latter. He remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War although his sympathies were on the other side. He was made Brevet Brigadier General but reached no more important command than that of Benton Barracks at St. Louis where he remained most of the time during the war. After peace came he retired from the service and took up his home at Fort Smith where he had previously formed close attachments. He died at Fort Smith June 12, 1878, and was buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis. Bonneville was married at Carlisle Barracks to Miss Ann Lewis. While stationed at St. Louis both his wife and daughter died. He was married again in 1870 to Miss Susan Neis of Fort Smith who survived him.

Bonneville had a brother in the American Navy who gained some distinction and was lost with the American ship *Wasp*.

"BONNEVILLE, BENJAMIN L. E. (Born in France. Appointed from N. Y.) Bvt. 2nd Lieut. Light Art., 11 Dec., 1815. 2nd Lieut., 15 Jan., 1817. 2nd Lieut. 8th Inf., 10 March, 1819. 1st Lieut., 9 July, 1820. Trans. to 7th Inf., 1 June, 1821. Dropped 31 May, 1834. Reinstated 19

Captain Bonneville's enterprise in the Rocky mountains was primarily, if not solely, for purposes of trade, whatever may have been the purposes set forth in his application for a leave of absence. There is nothing in the whole history of the expedition to justify any other view. The Captain in his service on the frontier had been an eye-witness of the various aspects of the fur trade and had conceived a desire to try his own hand at it. He could not of course ask so long a leave of absence solely to enable him to prosecute a private business, and he proposed to the government to turn his opportunities to valuable account in collecting information which would be of public utility. On this representation a leave of absence for two years was granted. The ground on which the government gave the leave, and the real purpose to which Captain Bonneville proposed to apply it, were therefore quite different. Let us see what he accomplished in both directions.

As to the commercial feature of the enterprise the result was an unqualified failure. Irving is generously silent on this subject but one may easily discern between the lines the author's conviction that the Captain had no aptitude as a trader. He was not trained to business, particularly the kind of business that was transacted in the mountains, and in his contacts with rival traders he was invariably worsted. He was unduly afraid of the Indians, was unwilling to take risks, and doubtless also held himself above the baser methods resorted to by irresponsible traders. He was lavish in his hospitality, popular with his men, and a great favorite with the free trappers who would travel hundreds of miles to avail themselves of the cheer of the Captain's tent. The Indians too liked him, but all — Indians and trappers alike — sold their furs in the other camp. The Captain hung on

April, 1836. Maj. 6th Inf., 15 July, 1845. Lieut. Col., 4th Inf., 7 May, 1849. Col. 3rd Inf., 3 Feb., 1855. Retired 9th Sept., 1861. Died 12 June, 1878. Bvt. Lieut. Col., 20 Aug., 1847, for gallant and meritorious service at Contreras and Churubusco. Bvt. Brig. Gen., 13 March, 1865, for long and faithful service in the army.—Powell's *List of Officers of the U. S. Army*.

for three years and probably would longer had his company been willing. The final outcome must have been a loss to them of many thousands of dollars.

The scientific feature of Captain Bonneville's expedition was, if possible, more of a failure than the commercial. The Captain never made any report of his work to the Department and it is probable that he had nothing of value to report. His adventures and observations were written up by Irving, and although that work contains a great deal of useful information, it is evident that a goodly portion of it was derived from other sources than from Captain Bonneville. The Captain's notes upon the nature of the country are limited and of no great value. His few astronomical observations for latitude and longitude are little better than wild guesses.¹³ Irving felt constrained to apologize for his fantastic views of Great Salt Lake, and he would have felt more so if he had known that the Captain's estimate of the altitude of that body of water above the level of the ocean (one and three-fourths miles) was considerably more than twice the correct figure. Touching the Indian tribes scarcely any information is given by Irving which is in line with the instructions of the War Department to Captain Bonneville.

The one really valuable result of Captain Bonneville's expedition, so far as he alone is concerned, was his two maps of the Western country. One of these is of the region about the sources of the Missouri, Yellowstone, Snake, Green, Wind and Sweetwater rivers, including the region of Great Salt Lake. The other, on half the scale, included the country westward from the region embraced in the first map, to the Pacific ocean.

These maps have won for Captain Bonneville a degree of credit for promoting geographical discovery to which he is in no sense entitled. Nearly all of the valuable features appeared on Gallatin's map of the year before and were further brought to public notice by Gallatin's memoir accom-

¹³ Longitude of Fort Bonneville 125 miles too far east.

Latitude of winter quarters on Salmon river 50 miles too far north.

panying the map. The three most important additions to geographical knowledge which must be credited to the Bonneville maps are the discovery and location of Humboldt river and lakes, the location of the San Joaquin river, California, and the approximately correct topography of the country around the sources of the Bighorn and Green rivers. In several respects Gallatin's map is more correct than Bonneville's. Gallatin's map unfortunately appeared in the transactions of a scientific society and came to the knowledge of only a select few. Bonneville's maps on the other hand had the name and fame of Washington Irving to advertise them to the world. Bonneville refers in no way to his debt to Gallatin or to Ashley and Smith, although it is evident that several important features were taken directly from these authorities.¹⁴ It was these maps, compiled in large part from data derived from Gallatin, Ashley and Smith, that won for Bonneville his reinstatement in the army. "By the Eternal, Sir!" President Jackson is said to have exclaimed when Bonneville showed him his map, "I'll see that you are reinstated to your command. For this valuable service to the War Department and the country you deserve high promotion." It is evident, therefore, that in direct and substantial reward, as well in public reputation, Captain Bonneville has received from his government and from his countrymen more than he deserves.¹⁵

¹⁴ It is unaccountable that so careful a student as General G. K. Warren, who was directed by the War Department "to carefully read every report and examine every map of survey, reconnaissance and travel that could be obtained," and who, in fulfillment of this duty, produced a map and memoir which have become a landmark in the history of western geography, should have overlooked altogether the important work of Albert Gallatin. He could not have seen it or he would not have given Captain Bonneville the credit for so much of the information which it contains.

¹⁵ Captain Bonneville gave his name to Great Salt Lake—an arrogant presumption when we consider the utter lack of any connection which his work had with that body of water. Posterity has very properly refused to recognize the name, although science has made use of it to designate the old Quaternary lake which once occupied a large part of the Great Basin.

As the manager of an expedition and as a popular leader Captain Bonneville was a distinct success. Had his function been solely that of conducting a party through the country, he might have rivaled Lewis and Clark in the skill with which he could accomplish it. He managed his men with great judgment, and it is no small item to his credit that, at a period when hunters and trappers were yearly lost in considerable numbers from the various companies, he remained three years in the mountains without the loss of a single life, where the men were in any wise under his personal control.

To Captain Bonneville belongs the credit of being the first to take wagons through South Pass and to Green river. Ashley had taken a wheeled cannon through to Utah Lake in 1826. Smith, Jackson and Sublette had taken wagons to Wind river in 1830; and the Santa Fe traders had taken wagons to Santa Fe in 1822. Bonneville's expedition was another step in the progress of civilization into the unsettled regions of the Far West.

As a soldier by education and profession, Captain Bonneville committed an unpardonable breach of discipline in overstaying his leave of absence. It was more than a simple lapse of duty, it was an act of ingratitude to his superiors, considering their great indulgence in granting him so long a leave. It was moreover unnecessary. The Captain sent in his returns in 1833 in ample time to have communicated with Washington before his leave expired. If he felt it imperative to stay with his expedition he should have applied for an extension of his leave. If not he should have reported to the Department and made his application in person. But he did neither although he had frequent opportunity to send communications. His action was therefore a gross delinquency and the War Department and Army authorities were quite right in resisting his reinstatement into the service.

After all it will not be far wrong to say that the greatest service which Captain Bonneville rendered his country was by falling into the hands of Washington Irving. His whole

advancement hitherto had been largely due to his fortuitous associations, and Lafayette and Paine were the architects of his fortune more than he himself was. But his luckiest accident was in furnishing the occasion for the production of Irving's description of Rocky mountain life during the best days of the fur trade. *Captain Bonneville*, as this work is now commonly called, is a true and living picture of those early scenes, and taken with *Astoria* will ever remain our highest authority upon the events to which they relate.¹⁶

¹⁶ In a former chapter we paid our respects to Hubert Howe Bancroft in the matter of his reckless endeavors to discredit the work and defame the character of Washington Irving. We shall here call attention to similar efforts in regard to the narrative of Bonneville's adventures. Mr. Bancroft misstates the title of this work, in calling it "*Adventures of Captain Bonneville*" whereas, as given by Irving, it was *The Rocky Mountains, or, Scenes, Incidents and Adventures in the Far West; digested from the Journal of Captain B. L. E. Bonneville, of the Army of the United States, and illustrated from various other sources*. On the exterior covers of the book the name of Captain Bonneville did not appear at all. This fact is important, as illustrating Irving's own view of the scope of the work. It was virtually a history of the operations of the fur companies in the Rocky mountains during that period from 1832 to 1835 when the trade was at its prime. Irving, who never despised the embellishments of art, worked his historical narrative around the nucleus of a single adventure and gave it an added interest by that method. But the repeated assertions of Mr. Bancroft that it is only "an elegant romance," a "thrilling narrative out of nothing," "Irving's fiction," "duplicitv," and the like, can proceed only from sheer ignorance or from a knavish purpose to belittle a great work.

In the case of *Astoria* we found Irving incomparably the most accurate historian of that enterprise — far more so than Mr. Bancroft, in spite of the greater facilities afforded by modern research. The same is also true of the later work. In regard to Captain Bonneville, it is clear that Irving himself did not have a high opinion of that officer's performance. If his never-failing generosity caused him to smooth over the short-comings of his hero, one can not fail to discern a lack of confidence in his actual achievements. Referring to the Great Salt Lake, for example, he characterizes the Captain's view of that body of water as "somewhat fanciful," and states that "he has evidently taken part of his ideas concerning it from the representations of others, who have somewhat exaggerated its features." Concerning the name

Lake Bonneville, that was given by Bonneville himself, and Irving adopted it from the Captain's map. There is no doubt whatever that Irving believed Bonneville's statement in regard to the Salt Lake expedition, and there would be no conclusive reason to doubt it today, but for the facts that have come to light through the narratives of Nidiver, Leonard and others, which were unknown to Irving.

As to Mr. Bancroft's infamous innuendoes regarding "well-paid panegyrics" as a result of Irving's acquaintance with Mr. Astor, the reader may note what we have said on this point in our treatment of *Astoria*.

Mr. Bancroft thus refers to Irving's humorous account of Bonneville's honey-alcohol entertainment on Bear river, July 10, 1834: "It is noticeable that whenever Irving sets two men drinking, his hero always acts the gentleman, while the other, especially if a foreigner, gets beastly drunk and disgraces himself." If Mr. Bancroft will consult Townsend's Narrative, page 84, he will find that no less an authority than Nathaniel J. Wyeth was himself greatly struck with the Captain's urbanity and politeness of manner in the face of considerable provocation, and that the unmannerly behavior was exactly where Irving places it.

But if Mr. Bancroft's treatment of Irving as an author is base and contemptible, his treatment of Captain Bonneville as a man is no less so. Small as may be our estimate of Bonneville's work in the Rocky mountains, we are bound to say that there is nothing in it all to justify the following vicious calumny: "A Frenchman by birth, and a captain in the United States Army, being in his coarse way a *bon vivant* and voluptuary, he preferred lording it in the forest with a troop of white and red savages at his heels, and every fortnight a new unmarried wife flaunting her brave finery, to sitting in satin sackcloth of conventional parlors and simpering silly nothings. . . . To shoot buffalo were rare fun; but men were the nobler game, whom to search out in their retreat and slaughter and scalp were glorious. What were the far-off natives of the Rocky mountains doing, that this reckless, blood-thirsty and cruel Frenchman should be permitted to kill them?" Mr. Bancroft should produce his facts. Can he give evidence of even *one* Indian who was killed or scalped or in any way maltreated by Captain Bonneville's order, or with his knowledge? If there is one characteristic of the expedition more prominent than another it was the humane treatment which Captain Bonneville always accorded the natives. If reference is made to the Walker massacre at the Humboldt Lakes, Captain Bonneville is morally no more responsible for that than Mr. Bancroft himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

NATHANIEL J. WYETH.

Hall J. Kelley — Wyeth's project — Formation of his party — Expedition at St. Louis — The start from Independence — Arrival at Pierre's Hole — Division of the party — Wyeth leaves Pierre's Hole for the Columbia — Arrives at Fort Vancouver — Spends winter on lower Columbia — Starts for the east in spring of 1833 — Proposes a joint hunt with Bonneville — Arrives at Green river rendezvous — Contract with Milton G. Sublette — Wyeth at Fort Union — Arrival in Boston — The Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company — Wyeth starts on his second expedition — Leaves Independence — M. G. Sublette compelled to return — Wyeth reaches Green river — Fitzpatrick repudiates Wyeth's contract with M. G. Sublette — Wyeth meets Captain Bonneville — Commences erection of Fort Hall — Reaches Fort Vancouver — Arrival of the *May Dacre* — Wyeth's operations in fall and winter of 1834-5 — Builds Fort Williams — Ill success and ill health — Wyeth closes up his business.

THE history of human progress shows that great movements frequently receive their initial impulse from the most visionary and impractical of men. Perhaps the very quality of being visionary — prone to see visions — makes possible a forecast of results which lack of practical ability in the individual could never accomplish. John Brown did as much as any man to give direction to public thought in favor of the emancipation movement in the United States, but a man less qualified than he to bring that movement to a successful issue could scarcely have been found. So with the vital question of the Northwest — the long-disputed Oregon Question — it was preached, published and kept before the public for many years by a man who proved himself wholly unfit to carry out his own schemes. This man was a Boston schoolmaster, Hall J. Kelley.

Scarcely had the grand enterprise of Mr. Astor upon the Columbia terminated in failure when Kelley in 1815 began his crusade. He read everything that he could find relating to Oregon, believed it all, however extravagant, and retailed it to the public with whatever addition his own over-wrought imagination might suggest. He published a great deal in current periodicals, circulated broadcast his pamphlets and tracts, and even obtained the ear of Congress in behalf of the Pacific empire whose fate, as he rightly considered, was even then trembling in the balance. What he wrote was for the most part grossly inaccurate; but with a public quite as ignorant as he, this was no drawback, but rather a positive advantage. Everything came from his pen clothed with the beauty of a western sunset. The fertile lands that could be had for the asking, the salubrious climate of that distant shore, the noble rivers with their living wealth of salmon, and finally the glorious empire which must be claimed before it should be too late, such were the themes that formed the burden of his fervid utterances. The barren plains to be crossed in reaching this promised land, the savage foes to be encountered, the perennial rains of the Pacific, and the years of drudgery in winning a home from the wilderness — of these Kelley had nothing to say. His crusade was a successful one in helping to turn men's minds to a subject of far-reaching national importance, and in this respect the American people owe to his memory a debt of gratitude. Although he never achieved the distinction of martyrdom in the cause which he so boldly and persistently championed, he will stand in history as the John Brown of the movement which saved to the United States a part of its rightful domain upon the Pacific.

The practical talents in which Kelley was deficient, were met with in a marked degree in one of his townsmen and disciples, Nathaniel J. Wyeth.¹ Not that Wyeth was ultimate-

¹Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth was born in Cambridge, Mass., January 29, 1802. His father, Jacob Wyeth, was a Harvard graduate. His mother, Elizabeth Jarvis Wyeth, was a member of the Jarvis family, owners of

ly any more successful than Kelley — his schemes, like those of Astor, were foredoomed to failure. A mighty corporation with an empire at its back was more than any individual single-handed could contend against. But Wyeth understood the essential conditions of ordinary business success. He was a man of great energy, sound judgment, and unquestioned integrity, a good organizer, fearless of obstacles, singularly free from visionary projects, and on the whole one of the ablest men whom the fur trade brought to public notice. His project for establishing a trade on the Pacific coast, like that of Astor before him, was in itself eminently feasible; but the conditions were such that without great financial backing and some support from the government he could not get a start; and unfortunately he never enjoyed either of these advantages.

The crusade of Hall J. Kelley found a ready response in the sympathetic and ambitious nature of Wyeth. The more he thought of the subject the more he came to believe that there was a great opening for business enterprise on the Pacific. His views developed very much on the same lines as those of Astor twenty years before, although of necessity

Jarvis field, famous in the annals of Harvard athletics. Young Wyeth was fitted for college, but decided, much to his regret in later years, not to take the time to complete a course. Upon leaving school he succeeded his father for a short time in the management of a pleasure resort on the borders of Fresh Pond, but disliking the business, he entered the employ of Frederick Tudor who had just originated the ice industry of the United States, including not only the cutting and storing of ice, but its export to foreign countries. Wyeth remained in the business until his western expedition took place, and became general manager of the company. After his return from the mountains in 1836 he re-entered the business with Mr. Tudor. In 1840 he set up on his own account. He was very assiduous in his work and invented most of the appliances which have since been in common use in the ice business. He was also largely interested in other enterprises such as brick-making, nurseries, etc. He died August 31, 1856, on the spot where he was born and which had been his life-long home.

The data for this note were furnished by Mrs. Mary J. Fish, of Taunton, Mass., a niece of Wyeth.

upon a much more modest scale. His project, as it finally assumed definite form, was in brief to organize a trading company to do business in the valley of the Columbia and its tributaries. It is generally understood to have been conceived with a view of developing the salmon trade, but this was not the case with the first expedition. The specific character of the trade was left undetermined, "without positively settling the particular business" to be followed, as Wyeth frequently wrote in reply to inquiries. Again he said: "The company go out for trade in such branches as may be expedient"; but he adds that "probably the fur business will be selected." His plan was to supply his parties in the field, and ship his products to market, by ocean vessels sailing to and from the Columbia. He believed that he could reach the whole tramontane country in that way more cheaply than overland from St. Louis and he therefore hoped to get the carrying trade of other parties doing business there. One cannot fail to observe the similarity in general outline between Wyeth's idea and that of Astor before him; but it was probably independently worked out by Wyeth, for he rarely if ever refers in his letters to Astor's experiences either by way of warning or guidance.

The first expedition was planned to include about fifty persons among whom there should be "no families or other helpless people." The nature of the compact which was to bind the little company together is thus stated by Wyeth himself: "Our company is to last five years. The profits are to be divided in such a manner that if the number concerned is fifty, and the whole net profits were divided into that number of parts, I should get eight, the surgeon two, and the remaining forty parts would be divided among the remaining forty-eight persons. The eight parts which I take is consideration for my service as head of the concern and furnishing the requisite capital and credit for the business, and which is to be invested in goods to a small amount, to take with us by land, camp equipage, horses, wagons, etc., and in vessels and goods to be sent out to us, so as to arrive

there within a few months afterward. Each man will be required to furnish his own equipment and pay his passage as far as Franklin, Missouri, which will amount to forty dollars, and the surplus to be paid for him from the capital if it amounts to more." ²

Wyeth at first contemplated joining fortunes with Hall J. Kelley who was at this time actively engaged in organizing his Oregon Colonization Society. He always acknowledged his debt to Kelley in turning his thoughts to the distant regions of the Columbia; but he found, as soon as he seriously concluded to go to that country, that the disciple would have to cut loose from the master if he were to accomplish anything. His quick judgment told him that the schoolmaster's visionary ideas would bring disaster to the whole enterprise. Some of his letters to Kelley, who counted on his co-operation, are worth quoting. Thus he says in one of them: "When you adopted the plan of taking across the continent in the first expedition women and children I gave up hope that you would go at all, and all intention of going with you if you did"; and in another: "You very much mistake if you think I wish to desert your party, but you must recollect that the 1st of January last was set at first as the time of starting," and it was now the 1st of March with no visible preparations yet, on Kelley's part. Wyeth, on the other hand, believed in keeping his appointments even if made only with himself. He had fixed on the 1st of March, 1832, as the approximate date of starting and he intended to start then. He did in fact leave Boston on the 10th of that month although he had secured a party of only twenty men.

Wyeth says little in detail of the makeup of his expedition, but some light upon it from a not very friendly source is furnished in a little book ³ published by a kinsman, John

² *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 20.

³ *A Short Story of a Long Journey*. This is a racy and sarcastic narrative of what the writer saw of the expedition. He had become disgusted with the enterprise and was not strictly impartial as an historian.

B. Wyeth, who accompanied the expedition to Pierre's Hole and then abandoned it. The party were at first required to wear a uniform consisting of a "coarse woolen jacket and pantaloons, a striped cotton shirt and cowhide boots. Every man had a musket, most of them rifles, all of them bayonets in a broad belt, together with a large clasp knife for eating and common purposes." A bugle was also provided for signaling. For crossing streams which were too deep to ford, the wagon boxes were carefully caulked and fitted for quick conversion into boats. The sight of this unusual contrivance excited the risibilities of the Cambridge students who poked no end of fun at it, and finally gave to the amphibious monster a scientific name of suitable length and dignity by calling it a *Nat-Wyethium*. All of these superfluous features of the outfit quickly disappeared before the rough experiences of the trip, and no one was more prompt to discard them than Wyeth himself as soon as he came in contact with the true conditions of the journey.

To carry out the maritime part of the program Wyeth secured the financial co-operation of the firm of Henry Hall and Tucker and Williams who provided the means for chartering and loading a small vessel, the *Sultana*, Captain Lambert, which was sent to the mouth of the Columbia by way of Cape Horn.

Wyeth himself left Boston with a party of twenty men and took sail to Baltimore. In that city he received four recruits. The strength of his party when he reached St. Louis was therefore twenty-four men. At St. Louis he came in contact with the veterans of the fur trade and for the first time understood how wide was their range of experience and how firmly they were established in the business which he was about to enter. McKenzie was down from Fort Union and Sublette was getting ready his mountain expedition. The contrast between their thorough knowl-

Wyeth himself characterized the book as full of "white lies"; misleading and unfair, but not maliciously false as were some of his other critics in the public prints. The little book is well worth perusal.

edge of the mountain business and the raw inexperience of Wyeth's little company was not intended to strengthen their confidence or enthusiasm in the success of the undertaking. Evidences of disaffection already began to show themselves, although not to such an extent but that the entire party proceeded on the journey as soon as the necessary preparations could be made at St. Louis. In less than a week they embarked on the steamboat *Otter* en route for the frontier rendezvous at Independence, leaving behind the boat-wagons which Wyeth sold at half-price when he learned that pack animals were almost exclusively used on the Oregon Trail. In due time most of the party arrived at Independence. Three, however, had deserted on the way up, and three more left soon afterward—a loss of one-fourth of a party which was less than half its intended strength to start with.

The little band remained upwards of two weeks at Independence getting ready for the forward movement. Here their inexperience and lack of suitable equipment were more than ever apparent and general discouragement might have caused the abandonment of the enterprise then and there, but for the timely arrival of William L. Sublette and his mountain expedition from St. Louis. With his perfect knowledge of conditions in the mountains Sublette saw that he had nothing to fear from this new company and might very likely draw all the men and the outfit into his own business before he got through with them. He therefore lent them a ready hand, set them on their feet, and offered them the protection of his own party as far as he should go. To the more timid this unexpected assistance seemed providential and they gave it an exaggerated importance which we may be sure that Wyeth did not. Says young John B. Wyeth: "To me it seems that we must have perished for want of sustenance in the deserts of the Missouri had we been by ourselves . . . and but for him we should probably never have reached the American Alps. By this time every man had begun to think for himself."

Under Sublette's pilotage Wyeth and his eighteen companions set out from Independence May 12th, crossed the plains, and without any notable incident reached the annual rendezvous of the traders in Pierre's Hole on July 8th. Here they found one of those unique and motley gatherings which could be seen only for a few years before and after 1830, a heterogeneous mixture of savages and white men of many and various descriptions. There were present about two hundred lodges of Indians, ninety trappers of the American Fur Company, one hundred of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, besides Wyeth's party and many free trappers. It was doubtless a strange and not very inviting spectacle to the men of far-off New England who had probably never seen a wild Indian before in their lives.

The party were now on Columbian waters. Sublette had accompanied them as far as he could. They must go the rest of the way alone. The situation was altogether serious to many of them, and young Wyeth's account of what transpired before the next important move took place, is so naively told as to justify its verbatim reproduction here. "We had been dissatisfied for some time, but we had not had leisure to communicate it, and systematize our grievances." Myself and some others requested Captain Wyeth to call a meeting of his followers, to ask information, and to know what we were to expect. . . . We wished to have what we had been used to at home— a town meeting — or a parish meeting, where every freeman has a right to speak his sentiments, and to vote thereon. But Captain Wyeth was by no means inclined to this democratical procedure. The most he seemed inclined to was a caucus with a select few, of which number neither his own brother, though older than himself, nor myself was to be included. After considerable altercation he concluded to call a meeting of the whole, on business interesting and applicable to all. We accordingly met, Captain Wyeth in the chair, or on the stump, I forget which. Instead of every man speaking his own mind, the Captain commenced the business by ordering the

roll to be called; and as the names were called the clerk asked the person if he would go on. The first name was Nathaniel J. Wyeth, whom we had dubbed Captain, who answered 'I shall go on.' The next was William Nud, who, before he answered, wished to know what the Captain's plan and intentions were, whether to try to commence a small colony or to trap and trade for beaver. To which Captain Wyeth replied that *that* was none of our business. Then Mr. Nud said: 'I shall not go on;' and as the names of the rest were called there appeared seven persons out of the twenty-one who were determined to return home."

The total number who finally left Captain Wyeth was seven, leaving eleven who adhered to the enterprise. Wyeth gave up one of his two tents to the returning party and the two factions pitched their camps about half a mile apart.

It is impossible not to admire the Napoleonic spirit of Captain Wyeth on this occasion. It was not, in his opinion, a time for democratic debates, but for action. He wanted the true and untrue separated from each other that he might know exactly where he stood. For that purpose one question was enough: "Will you go or return?" No amount of conciliatory debate would have settled the question more effectually.

Wyeth now attached himself, for protection until beyond the range of the Blackfeet, to M. G. Sublette's party who were going off to the westward and southwestward to trap. The dissenters attached themselves to the returning party of William L. Sublette. M. G. Sublette's party set out on the 17th of July, but went only a short distance that day. On the following morning they met a party of Blackfeet about eight miles from rendezvous and brought on the celebrated battle of Pierre's Hole.⁴ This affair delayed M. G. Sublette and Wyeth three days, and W. L. Sublette, who had been wounded in the fight, twelve days. The seven returning Wyethians becoming impatient set out on the 25th of July with Alfred K. Stephens and a party of four

⁴ See Part IV., Chapter II.

men, but while in the vicinity of Jackson Hole on the following day, they were attacked by the Blackfeet. One of their number, More, and a man named Foy, were killed on the spot, and Stephens was fatally wounded. No other adventure of importance occurred on the way back, and that part of the Wyeth expedition reached home in safety, wiser, if not wealthier, than when they started.

On the 24th of July Wyeth and Milton Sublette again set out on their journey. They went south across Snake river and then took a southwesterly direction to the Portneuf river, and thence to the Snake near the American Falls where they arrived on the 13th of August. Their further course for many weeks lay among the streams that empty into the Snake river from the south, where Wyeth tried his hand at trapping, with a view, no doubt, of getting some experience in that business. He was moderately successful but he was compelled to cache the furs he gathered, for his party was too small to transport them. On the 29th of August Wyeth parted company with Sublette, not without sincere regret.⁵ It is quite impossible to follow him closely in his wanderings in the valley of Snake river, for he makes use of almost no geographical names. His men were often short of provisions, as have been all parties traveling in that desolate region. On the 28th of September the party unexpectedly ran across Sublette and Fraeb nearly opposite the mouth of the Boise, but Wyeth, who was away from camp, did not see them. Finally, after much trouble in securing a guide they succeeded in traversing the Blue mountains and arrived at the Hudson Bay Company's post at the mouth of the Walla Walla river October 14th at five o'clock P. M.

At the hands of Mr. Pambrun, who was in charge of the post, as from all the other agents of the Hudson Bay Company, Wyeth received the most lavish hospitality and uniform kindness. However much he may have felt cause to complain of their influence in ruining his own schemes, he

⁵ "This party have treated us with great kindness which I shall long remember." *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 165.

never failed to acknowledge his deep debt to them for their generosity in the many hours of distress which he experienced while in their country.

Wyeth took leave of Fort Walla Walla October 19th and reached Fort Vancouver on the morning of the 29th, and a week later he made a visit to Fort George and the mouth of the Columbia. Either at Vancouver or George he learned that his ship had been wrecked at the Society Islands and that this part of his program had ended in disaster. Upon his return to Vancouver November 19th, the men unanimously asked for their discharge, as it was patent to all of them that the expedition was a failure and that they would have to shift for themselves. Wyeth could not of course refuse, and the little band here dissolved the compact under which they had made the first continuous journey on record from Boston to the mouth of the Columbia. "They were good men," is Wyeth's brief comment in his journal, "and persevered as long as perseverance would do any good. I am now afloat on the great sea of life without stay or support."⁶

Wyeth spent the winter with his hospitable entertainers at Fort Vancouver except for an excursion which he made up the Willamette river. He accomplished nothing further than to add to his stock of information. On the 3rd of February, 1833, he set out for the East in company with Mr. Ermatinger of the Hudson Bay Company who was bound for the post among the Flathead Indians. They ascended the Columbia to Fort Walla Walla, then struck out northeast for Spokane House, at that time abandoned and in ruins, from which point they made a side trip to Fort Colville. From Spokane they made their way into the

⁶ Wyeth left Boston with twenty men besides himself. He secured four more at Baltimore. Before he left Independence six deserted. At Pierre's Hole seven turned back. Wyeth and eleven men went on. At Vancouver two died, five went home by sea, two remained in the country and two started back east with Wyeth in the spring of 1833. Of these two one was discharged in the Flathead country and the other apparently completed the journey home.

Flathead country, arriving at the company's fort there on the 7th of April. From this point Wyeth made a tortuous journey south, passing across the Divide to the sources of the Missouri, thence back to the sources of the Salmon river and thence into the valley of the Godin river and the plains of Snake river where he could see the Three Buttes to the south and the Three Tetons far to the southeast. Here he fell in with Bonneville's clerk, Hodgkiss, and through him wrote to the Captain under date of June 22, making a proposition for a joint hunt in the country south of the Columbia as far as to the vicinity of the Spanish settlements in California. Captain Bonneville accepted this proposition and it was arranged that Wyeth should lead the party. Wyeth joined Bonneville on the 2nd of July at a point about eighteen miles east of Henry river and the two remained in camp here for the next five days. Wyeth employed the 4th of July in writing numerous letters to parties in the East in all of which he mentions his arrangement with Bonneville for the next year's hunt and his intention to go to California. It was a cold, disagreeable day, yet the indefatigable Wyeth penned no fewer than seven long letters which together make up eight pages of fine print as they have recently been given to the world. He presumably wrote also the copy in his letter-book. It was not a very cheerful outlook to the brave New Englander, there on the bleak desert, spending the natal day of his beloved country.⁷ But he was true game and although he confessed that reflections upon his situation now and then gave him the "blue devils," he never relaxed for a moment his energy and determination to succeed.

But either on the 4th or the following day a complete

⁷ "I hope that today you are better off than myself. I hope you are in peace of mind and content, enjoying with your friends and family the festivities of the day, and I hope you have a thought, too, of me. Imagine to yourself a fellow seated on the open and extensive prairie beside a little brook, without fire in freezing weather, and poorly clad in skins with plenty of poor raw dried buffalo meat, and you see Nat." *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 65.

change, of which we have not the slightest explanation, came over Wyeth's plans. He gave up his arrangement with Bonneville and decided to go directly home. The letters written the day before, which he was to have sent by Mr. Cerré, were now unnecessary, and "not sent" is written across the face of each in the letter-book. Although Wyeth says that he had furs enough in various caches through the mountains to pay his expenses thus far, still he does not seem to have collected them, but started immediately for home, going by way of the annual rendezvous at the head of Green river. He set out on the 7th of July, passed the battle ground of Pierre's Hole on the 10th, crossed Snake river the next day, passed the spot where one of his men was killed by the Blackfeet the year before, and reached Green river at Bonneville's fort on the 15th. Here the great gathering of the mountain parties was already assembled,⁸ and here Wyeth received his first letters from home.

The rendezvous broke up about the 25th of July and the various parties set out via South Pass for the Bighorn river where they intended to ship their cargoes for St. Louis. Wyeth's trip in a bullboat from the head of navigation on the Bighorn to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone was full of incident and has given Irving an opportunity for one of the best passages in his *Captain Bonneville*. In particular the completeness with which Wyeth took the conceit out of his hunters who professed a keen contempt for the raw Easterner, and repeatedly excelled them in their own craft, gave evident satisfaction to the genial author. Wyeth spent August 12th to 16th making his bullboat, a few miles above the Little Bighorn. While here he entered into a contract, August 14th, with Milton Sublette, on be-

⁸"Found here collected Captain Walker, Bonneville, Cerry of one Co., Drips and Fontenelle of the American Fur Co., Mr. Campbell just from St. Louis, Messrs. Fitzpatrick, Gervais, Milton Sublette of R. M. F. Co., and in all the companies about three hundred whites and a small village of Snakes." *Sources of the History of Oregon*, p. 205.

half of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, giving a bond for its faithful performance, to bring out next year before a stated time three thousand dollars' worth of merchandise required by the company for the prosecution of their trade the following year.

Wyeth set out in his bullboat on the 16th of August, arriving at Fort Cass on the following day, and at Fort Union on the 24th where they were entertained for the next three days by McKenzie⁹ "with all possible politeness and hospitality." Meanwhile Wyeth took careful note of the fort which he considered to have been "better furnished than any British fort" which he had seen. Naturally he did not fail to record his enjoyment of such luxuries as milk, flour, bread, bacon, cheese, and butter. He also noted that they used coal and burned lime, and he records with ominous import, when read in the light of later events, that "they are beginning to distill spirits from corn traded from the Indians below, owing to some restriction on the introduction of the article into the country." At Union Wyeth found the identical powder flask that belonged to More who was killed by the Blackfeet the year before. It had been brought in and traded by the Indians.

Wyeth left the fort at 10:30 A. M. on August 27th in company with Milton Sublette. Just as they were going into camp for the night they met William L. Sublette who had been establishing opposition posts along the river and was now about to erect one near Fort Union. Here Milton concluded to remain with his brother, and Wyeth was therefore left without any one who had ever descended the river before. His only comment upon the situation was: "*I can go down stream,*" and down he started the next morning. He passed the Mandans September 2nd, Fort Pierre on the 8th, Council Bluffs on the 21st, Leavenworth on the 27th, St. Louis October 9th and reached Cambridge November 7th. In passing Leavenworth he reported to the gov-

⁹ McKenzie's opinion of Wyeth — "a man of many schemes and considerable talent."

ernment authorities the fact that McKenzie was running a whiskey distillery at Fort Union.

With as much energy and enthusiasm as if his last year's venture had been a brilliant success instead of a total failure, Wyeth began, on the very day of his return, preparations for a repetition of his experiment. His report of operations to Messrs. Henry Hall, Tucker and Williams, and his various letters written at this time, furnish some of the most authentic data now extant upon the fur trade of that period. No better proof could be found of Wyeth's ability and energy than the fact that in spite of his failure thus far he was able to enlist his financial associates in a second and more extensive enterprise. His contract with M. G. Sublette gave him a substantial *point d'appui* in arranging for means to launch his new expedition. He counted upon it as a starting point in opening up a carrying trade for parties doing business in the mountains. He had observed so carefully everything connected with the trade that his minute familiarity with it all astonished his friends and despite his lack of success they resolved to give him one more trial. A company was formed under the name of the Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company. Another ship, the *May Dacre*, was outfitted to go round by sea. Milton Sublette came on to Boston during the winter and with him Wyeth made arrangements to fill his contract for the ensuing season. A further evidence of the versatility of Wyeth's ambition is seen in the fact that he found time amid the rush of his business to learn how to take latitude and longitude and carried with him the instruments for making observations.

Having made all the necessary arrangements Wyeth left Boston on his second expedition February 7th, 1834. and arrived at St. Louis March 9th where he organized a company of seventy men, intending to cross the plains with the parties going to the annual rendezvous. He left St. Louis on the 3rd of April and arrived at Independence in due time with all of his party and goods. Here he complains that "the opposition of the four companies have made me pay a

heavy advance on men and high prices for horses." But Wyeth was now a veteran with the rest of them and he was able to report to his financial sponsors that "everything is favorable except that the expense will be greater than has been calculated."

His present expedition was honored by the presence of some distinguished travelers. There were two scientists, Thomas Nuttall and J. K. Townsend, and several missionaries under the leadership of Jason and Daniel Lee. Referring to the latter in a letter dated April 17th, Wyeth says: "There are none of the dignitaries with me yet, and if they preach much longer in the States they will lose their passage, for I will not wait a minute for them." They did, however, arrive in time and the united parties set out on their long journey on the 28th of April, 1834.

On the 8th of May Milton G. Sublette was compelled to abandon the expedition on account of sickness. On the 12th William L. Sublette with his expedition passed Wyeth. These two events, unimportant in themselves, had deep meaning for Wyeth, who already, no doubt, began to fear the machinations of the elder Sublette and to suspect that with both Milton and himself absent from rendezvous when Sublette arrived his own interests would receive scant consideration. He sent a letter by Sublette to Fitzpatrick notifying him of his early approach with goods in compliance with his contract.

The journey across the plains was a pleasant and successful one. On the 1st of June the party crossed Laramie river and found some of Sublette's men engaged in building a post there, the first ever erected in that locality, where later stood the most important military fort of the plains. Independence Rock was passed on the morning of the 9th and from an inscription left by Sublette it was learned that he had passed there three days before. This day Wyeth sent an express to Fitzpatrick notifying him of his near approach. South Pass was crossed June 14th and the party proceeded by rapid marches down the Big Sandy. The following

entry in Wyeth's journal for June 19th describes the close of his journey to the rendezvous: "On the night of the 17th I left camp to hunt Fitzpatrick and slept on the prairie. In the morning struck Green river and went down to the forks and finding nothing went up again and found rendezvous about twelve miles up, and much to my astonishment the goods which I had contracted to bring up to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company were refused by those honorable gentlemen. Latitude 41 degrees 30 minutes."

Thus Wyeth's worst fears were realized. The merchandise which he had transported across the prairie was refused. The absence of Milton G. Sublette and the early arrival at rendezvous of William L. had enabled the latter to induce the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to refuse to stand by the contract. In fact affairs in the mountains had taken on a dismal aspect. Between mutual quarrelings and attacks by the Indians none of the companies had made more than enough to pay off their men. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company was on the point of dissolution, and was dissolved on the 20th of June, and the new firm of Fitzpatrick, Sublette and Bridger was formed. These gloomy prospects no doubt had their weight with Fitzpatrick, of whom Wyeth thus writes to Milton Sublette under date of July 1st: "I do not accuse you or him of any intention of injuring me in this manner when you made the contract, but I think he has been bribed to sacrifice my interests by better offers from your brother."

As for Wyeth the most he received was an advance of five hundred dollars which he had made to Milton G. Sublette at Independence, and the "forfeit," whatever that might have been, which the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was obligated to pay; but they refused "even to pay the interest on cash advances for there is no law here." Wyeth was highly indignant at this thoroughly dishonest treatment and he is said to have told Fitzpatrick and Sublette that he would yet "roll a stone into their garden which they would never be able to get out." His first movement was a practical

fulfillment of his threat. Finding himself encumbered with a quantity of goods which he had expected to be rid of at Green river, some new arrangement became immediately necessary. With characteristic promptness Wyeth decided to build a fort as soon as he should reach Snake river, and leave there a trader with his surplus goods. With 126 horses, forty-one men and his outfit of merchandise he left camp on Ham's Fork¹⁰ July 3rd, and set out for Snake river. The 4th of July he spent in camp on Twin creek, a branch of Bear river, where he gave the men a celebration,¹¹ in company with Cerré and Walker, who were going east with Bonneville's returns. Wyeth reached the Soda Springs on Bear river July 8th and then started across the country for Snake river. On the 10th he passed Bonneville who was exerting himself to keep out of his way. He reached Snake river on the 14th and selected a site for his post the next day. Its erection was commenced on the 16th and by the 5th of August was so far progressed that Wyeth felt that he could proceed on his journey. His entry in his diary for August 6th is: "Having done as much as was requisite for safety to the fort and drank a bale of liquor and named it Fort Hall¹² in honor of the oldest partner of our concern, we left it and with it Mr. Evans in charge of eleven men and fourteen horses and mules and three cows." This

¹⁰ There is no little confusion as to the precise location of this year's rendezvous, but from Wyeth's journal it seems to have been about 12 miles above the mouth of the Big Sandy in the valley of Green river. The parties, however, did not remain here but moved over to Ham's Fork, a short day's march, on the 19th. It was here that all of Wyeth's correspondence at this time was dated, and here were signed the contracts for the dissolution of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the organization of its successor.

¹¹ "I gave the men too much alcohol for peace and took a pretty hearty spree myself." Wyeth's Journal.

¹² "Since mine of June 21st from Ham's Fork I have, as I then proposed, built a fort on Snake or Lewis river in Lat. 43 deg. 14 min. N. and Long. 113 deg. 30 min. W. which I named Fort Hall in honor of the oldest gentleman in the concern. We manufactured a magnificent flag from some unbleached sheeting, a little red flannel and a few blue

was the stone which Wyeth rolled into the garden of the mountain traders and which they never succeeded in rolling out.

Wyeth having crossed the Snake river made his way over the lava plain to the Boise river and down that stream to the Snake which he forded on the 23rd of August. He arrived at the Grande Ronde August 31st and found Captain Bonneville there. Resuming his route he reached Fort Walla Walla September 2nd and Fort Vancouver on the 14th of that month. The next day the brig *May Dacre* arrived and Wyeth learned that she had been struck by lightning on her way out and had been compelled to put into Valparaiso for repairs at a loss of three months' time. This made her too late for the fishing season and thus another move in Wyeth's combination had failed. The vessel was retained till winter and was sent to the Sandwich Islands with a load of "timber and card" returning in the spring with cattle, sheep, goats, hogs, etc.

During the autumn and winter Wyeth pushed his business with almost incredible energy. He personally explored the Willamette valley as far as to the falls of that river. He sent Captain Thing of the *May Dacre* with eight of his men and thirteen Sandwich Islanders to Fort Hall with an outfit of supplies. He himself conducted an extensive trapping expedition along the Des Chutes river going as far as its sources in central Oregon. While on this expedition he was on the lookout for some deserters whom he supposed to have gone in that direction. He also established a trading post on Wappatoo Island near the mouth of the Willamette,

patches; saluted it with damaged powder and wet it in villainous alcohol, and after all it makes, I do assure you, a very respectable appearance among the dry and desolate regions of central America. Its bastions stand a terror to the skulking Indian and a beacon of safety to the fugitive hunter. It is manned by 12 men and has constantly loaded in the bastions 100 guns and rifles. These bastions command both the inside and outside of the fort." Wyeth to Leonard Jarvis dated Columbia river October 6, 1834. Wyeth's second post was Fort William on Wappatoo Island. He contemplated building a third near Great Salt Lake.

which he named Fort William, presumably for another member of the Boston firm of Henry Hall and Tucker and Williams.¹³

Wyeth's indomitable pluck won for him the admiration of every one and particularly of the philanthropic Hudson Bay Company factor at Fort Vancouver, the venerable Dr. John McLoughlin. These two men formed an earnest and lasting attachment for each other with which the necessities of business competition were never permitted to interfere.

But in spite of Wyeth's herculean efforts his business did not prosper. His British friends, though kind and hospitable to a degree, could not, of course, aid him in his schemes of commercial rivalry, and gradually, yet surely, he saw the fabric of his hopes crumble to ruin. The salmon business did not develop as was expected. Fourteen of his men were lost within a year by drowning or at the hands of the Indians. All the rest had suffered much from sickness, and Wyeth himself, after almost incredible sufferings, was seized with bilious fever late in the summer of 1835 and very nearly perished. His situation at the time may best be told in the words of a friendly eye witness. Townsend the naturalist in his journal of July 11, 1835, says: "It really seems that the 'Columbia River Fishing and Trading Company' is devoted to destruction; disasters meet them at every turn, and as yet none of their schemes have prospered. This has not been for want of energy or exertion. Captain Wyeth has pursued the plans which to him seemed best adapted for ensuring success, with the most indefatigable perseverance and industry, and has endured hardships without murmuring which would have prostrated many a more robust man. Nevertheless he has not succeeded."

¹³ To Wyeth's great astonishment, upon his return to Vancouver from this expedition he found Hall J. Kelley, who had at length reached the land of his long years of dreaming. But he had arrived forlorn and discredited, having come up from California by land, and, it was said, having been a party to a theft of horses. On this account, says Wyeth, he "is not received at the fort as a gentleman. A house is given him and food is sent him from the governor's table but he is not suffered to mess here."

Farnham in his *Travels in the Western Prairies* likewise speaks enthusiastically of Wyeth's management. "From what I saw and heard of Wyeth's management in Oregon I was impressed with the belief that he was, beyond comparison, the most talented business man from the States that ever established himself in the territory." But, according to this same authority, the causes of his failure were not hard to find. "In pursuance of the avowed doctrine of that company [the Hudson Bay] that no others have a right to trade in furs beyond the Rocky mountains, whilst the use of capital and their incomparable skill and perseverance can prevent it, they established a fort near him [referring here to Fort Hall], preceded him, followed him, surrounded him everywhere and cut the throat of his prosperity with such kindness and politeness that Wyeth was induced to sell his whole interest, existent and prospective, in Oregon, to his generous, but too indefatigable, skilful and powerful antagonist."

In language almost pathetic Wyeth himself, on one occasion where his misfortunes had gotten the better of his feelings, thus unbosoms himself in a letter to his uncle, Leonard Jarvis: "I am surrounded with difficulties beyond any former period of my life and without the health and spirit to support them. In this situation you can judge if memory brings to me the warnings of those wiser and older who advised a course which would at least have resulted in quietness. Yes, memory lends its powers for torment. A few days ago she told a tale which carried me back to early life, led me through the varying shades of days and years, while at every step the tale grew darker and at last delivered me to the horrors of the present time. What at that moment they were you may imagine — a business scattered over half the deserts of the earth, and myself a powerless lump of matter in the extremity of mortal pain with little hope of surviving a day; and if it could have been said, 'he never existed,' glad to go down with that sun."

Having now given up all hope of successfully continuing

the business Wyeth turned his thoughts to the matter of closing it out as advantageously as possible. He went to Fort Hall in the fall of 1835 and remained there during the winter. Returning to Fort William in the spring he placed it in charge of a Mr. C. M. Walker with directions to lease it for fifteen years if he could, and then went back to Fort Hall where he arrived on the 18th of June. A week later he left for the east by way of Taos and the Arkansas river and reached home early in the autumn of 1836. In the following year Fort Hall and all its appurtenances were sold to the Hudson Bay Company. Fort William was not disposed of, and Wyeth's possession of the island became the foundation of a claim for it at a later date under United States laws.

Thus ended in failure, but not dishonor, one of the celebrated enterprises of the American Fur Trade. The causes of its failure are plainly apparent, and may all be summed up in want of adequate preparation, and in the apathy of the United States government to its true interests on the Pacific. Wyeth's enterprise was not unlike Astor's, but was undertaken at a time when the great company which had worsted Astor was firmly established in all the valley of the Columbia. If the unlimited resources of Mr. Astor could not succeed where he had at least an even chance with his rivals, how little could Wyeth expect success against the same rivals now firmly established and for twenty years in possession of the country. Nothing could have prevented his failure except heavy financial backing which could have held out through months and perhaps years of preliminary failure. This backing Wyeth did not have. "The business I am in must be closed," he wrote to his old partner in the ice business, "not that it might not be made a good one, but that those who are now engaged in it are not the men to make it so. The smallest loss makes them 'fly the handle' and such men can rarely succeed in a new business." It was no dishonor to Wyeth that he failed. His plans were in themselves well conceived, no less so than those of Astor, but

success in both cases unfortunately depended upon questions of an international character over which private individuals had no control.¹⁴

¹⁴Wyeth's journal and letter books, which were kept with extraordinary fullness and regularity, even amid the difficulties of his long overland journeys, are an invaluable store of information concerning the fur trade between 1830 and 1840. They have recently been published by the Historical Society of Oregon under the title of *Sources of the History of Oregon*. It is interesting to know that Irving had access to these documents during his preparation of the history of Captain Bonneville's adventures.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OREGON TRAIL.

The Astorians and the Oregon Trail—Work of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company—Recovery of the old line—The Trail a national road—Its character as a highway—Impression upon the Indians—The Trail as a memorial—Reoccupation of the Trail—Itinerary of the Trail—Independence and Westport—Brady Island—Scott's Bluffs—Laramie river—Sweetwater river—Independence Rock—The Devil's Gate—South Pass—Fort Bridger—Sublette's Cutoff—Soda Springs—Portneuf river—Fort Hall—Fort Boise—The Grande Ronde—The Columbia river—Fort Vancouver.

THE course of our narrative thus far has indicated pretty definitely the development of a general route of travel across the plains and over the Rocky mountains. The goings and comings of the trappers and traders had gradually connected the more feasible crossings of the mountains and deserts until by 1843 there was a well-defined continuous route from the Missouri river at the mouth of the Kansas to the Pacific ocean at the mouth of the Columbia. It is known in Western history as the Oregon Trail.

The history of the Oregon Trail begins with the Astorian expeditions of 1811-1813. In their outward journey Hunt and Crooks followed the line of the Trail approximately from the mouth of the Portneuf where Fort Hall later stood to the mouth of the Columbia. Stuart and Crooks, on their return journey, after reaching the mouth of the Portneuf, followed the subsequent route across to Bear river and up this stream to the mouth of Thompson Fork. At this point they left the river and made their wide and senseless detour to the north in order to get back to Hunt's outgoing route of the previous year. They again touched the Trail a few

miles west of South Pass, but instead of turning east into the pass, they went some distance south and then turned east, paralleling the Trail for about one hundred miles. Finally turning north they came again on the Trail in the Sweetwater valley at no great distance above the Devil's Gate. From this point eastward to Grand Island in the valley of the Platte they were on the line of the Trail; but they continued down the Platte to the Missouri, whereas the Trail, as it later developed, crossed the country from Grand Island to the mouth of the Kansas. The Astorians thus traveled, on their two expeditions, nearly the whole course of the Oregon Trail. They also published an account of their journey in which they pronounced the route entirely practicable, even for wagons.¹

The next step in the development of the Trail may be traced to the parties of General Ashley. South Pass was discovered, probably in the fall of 1823, and certainly not later than 1824. The line of the Sweetwater valley was opened up at the same time, as was also the route from South Pass to Bear river. In 1826 Jedediah S. Smith connected this route with Southern California by another extending from Great Salt Lake to the Colorado river and thence across the Mojave desert to the Spanish settlements. In the following year he opened the route between San Francisco and Great Salt Lake across the Sierra Nevada mountains. Between 1832 and 1836 the parties of Bonneville and Wyeth passed repeatedly over all parts of the Trail, while Walker crossed from Great Salt Lake to the Pacific. The portion of the route between Independence, Mo., and Grand Island on the Platte came into use at an early day, but

¹In a strict sense the Oregon Trail, and all the other early routes of travel, were opened up by the Indians to whom they had been known from time immemorial. These people did simply what any other people would do, what even the wild beasts do, they crossed the country by those routes which offered the fewest obstacles to travel. And so it came about that all these early routes of travel, which became so prominent in later times, were occupied by Indian trails when the white man first passed along them.

there is no record as to when or by whom it was opened up. While Independence was the usual starting place, parties frequently left the Missouri at Fort Leavenworth, St. Joseph, and Council Bluffs.

At the period with which this sketch closes, the Oregon Trail existed in its simple primary condition without any of the modification of later times. As travel increased with the inflow of emigrants numerous short-cuts were introduced here and there, while in some places the road became so worn that new locations were necessary, and thus from one cause or another there came to be several parallel lines over many portions of the route. Sometimes they were but a few hundred feet from each other; and again they were separated by many miles of distance and occasionally by rivers and mountains. In 1843 none of these modifications had been made, and the route as here given is the original line as it first came into general use. There are fortunately several good descriptions of the Trail dating from about this time. Fremont began his explorations in 1842. Joel Palmer has left a minute distance table and description of the route as he saw it in 1845. Major Howard Stansbury made an official report upon it from his exploration in 1849 as far as Salt Lake valley. The data for recovering the Trail within approximate limits are therefore ample.

We say "approximate limits" advisedly, for it would be indeed a difficult matter to lay down the old line with minute precision. The changes wrought by the settlement of the country have been too great. The land surveys with their rectangular divisions have forced the highways out of their natural course and in many places the old road has long since been plowed up and turned into cultivated ground. The advent of railroads wrought an immense change in the location of names. Although many of the old Trail names survive, the towns which they denote are rarely located where the names used to apply. They have probably gone to the nearest railway station which may be several miles away. From causes like these the old Trail has become

totally obliterated and its precise location lost over most of that portion between Independence on the Missouri and Grand Island on the Platte. Over the rest of the route with few exceptions the location is precisely known, for it lay in river valleys and along streams most of the way. In some places the old road is still visible.

This wonderful highway was in the broadest sense a national road, although not surveyed or built under the auspices of the government. It was the route of a national movement — the migration of a people seeking to avail itself of opportunities which have come but rarely in the history of the world, and which will never come again. It was a route, every mile of which has been the scene of hardship and suffering, yet of high purpose and stern determination. Only on the steppes of Siberia can so long a highway be found over which traffic has moved by a continuous journey from one end to the other. Even in Siberia there are occasional settlements along the route, but on the Oregon Trail in 1843 the traveler saw no evidence of civilized habitation except four trading posts, between Independence and Fort Vancouver.

As a highway of travel the Oregon Trail is the most remarkable known to history. Considering the fact that it originated with the spontaneous use of travelers; that no transit ever located a foot of it; that no level established its grades; that no engineer sought out the fords or built any bridges or surveyed the mountain passes; that there was no grading to speak of nor any attempt at metalling the road-bed; and the general good quality of this two thousand miles of highway will seem most extraordinary. Father De Smet, who was born in Belgium, the home of good roads, pronounced the Oregon Trail one of the finest highways in the world. At the proper season of the year this was undoubtedly true. Before the prairies became too dry, the natural turf formed the best roadway for horses to travel on that has probably ever been known. It was amply hard to sustain traffic, yet soft enough to be easier to the

feet than even the most perfect asphalt pavement. Over such roads, winding ribbon-like through the verdant prairies, amid the profusion of spring flowers, with grass so plentiful that the animals reveled in its abundance, and game everywhere greeted the hunter's rifle, and finally, with pure water in the streams, the traveler sped his way with a feeling of joy and exhilaration. But not so when the prairies became dry and parched, the road filled with stifling dust, the stream-beds mere dry ravines, or carrying only alkaline water which could not be used, the game all gone to more hospitable sections, and the summer sun pouring down its heat with torrid intensity. It was then that the Trail became a highway of desolation, strewn with abandoned property, the skeletons of horses, mules, and oxen, and, alas! too often, with freshly-made mounds and head-boards that told the pitiful tale of sufferings too great to be endured. If the Trail was the scene of romance, adventure, pleasure, and excitement, so it was marked in every mile of its course by human misery, tragedy, and death.

The immense travel which in later years passed over the Trail carved it into a deep furrow, often with several parallel tracks making a total width of a hundred feet or more. It was an astonishing spectacle even to white men when seen for the first time. Captain Reynolds, of the Corps of Engineers, United States Army, tells a good story on himself in this connection. In the fall of 1859 he came south from the Yellowstone river along the eastern base of the Bighorn mountains and struck the Trail somewhere above the first ford of the North Platte. Before reaching it he innocently asked his guide, Bridger, if there was any danger of their crossing the Trail *without seeing it!* Bridger answered him with only a look of contemptuous amazement.

It may be easily imagined how great an impression the sight of this road must have made upon the minds of the Indians. Father De Smet has recorded some interesting

observations upon this point. In 1851 he traveled in company with a large number of Indians from the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers to Fort Laramie, where a great council was held in that year to form treaties with the several tribes. Most of these Indians had not been in that section before, and were quite unprepared for what they saw. "Our Indian companions," says Father De Smet, "who had never seen but the narrow hunting-paths by which they transport themselves and their lodges, were filled with admiration on seeing this noble highway, which is as smooth as a barn floor swept by the winds, and not a blade of grass can shoot up on it on account of the continual passing. They conceived a high idea of the countless *White Nation*, as they express it. They fancied that all had gone over that road, and that an immense void must exist in the land of the rising sun. Their countenances testified evident incredulity when I told them that their exit was in nowise perceived in the *land of the whites*. They styled the route the *Great Medicine Road of the Whites*."

Over much of its length the Trail is now abandoned, but in many places it is not yet effaced from the soil, and may not be for centuries. There are few more impressive sights than portions of this old highway today. It still lies there upon the prairie, deserted by the traveler, an everlasting memorial of the human tide which once filled it to overflowing. Nature herself has helped to perpetuate this memorial, for the prairie winds, year by year, carve the furrow more deeply, and the wild sunflower blossoms along its course, as if in silent memory of those who sank beneath its burdens.

But if the Trail, as a continuous highway of travel, has ceased to exist, the time will come, we may confidently believe, when it will be reoccupied, never to be abandoned again. It is so occupied at the present time over a large portion of its length. Railroads practically follow the old line from Independence to Caspar, Wyo., some fifty miles east of Independence Rock; and from Bear river on the Utah-Wyoming line to the mouth of the Columbia. The

time is not distant when the intermediate space will be occupied, and possibly a continuous and unbroken movement of trains over the entire line may some day follow. In a future still more remote there may be realized a project which is even now being agitated, of building a magnificent national road along this line as a memorial highway which shall serve the future and commemorate the past.

The Oregon Trail and the Santa Fe Trail were considered as starting from the vicinity of the mouth of the Kansas river. Although the real starting point was St. Louis, the journey from that city to the Kansas was generally made by steamboat. But at the latter point the course of the Missouri turned very nearly due north and no longer lay in a direction to accommodate those who were going either to Santa Fe or to the Columbia. It therefore became necessary to abandon the boats here and organize land expeditions. Two towns grew up as a consequence of this outfitting trade — *Independence* and *Westport*, progenitors of the present Kansas City. Independence was the older of the two towns. In 1825 the Osage title to the western strip of the State of Missouri was extinguished and settlement began to pour into this territory. The town site of Independence was located on the 29th of March, 1827. Its early growth was largely due to the Santa Fe trade. Previously to the founding of Independence the Santa Fe expeditions had mostly started from Franklin, Missouri, but now began to outfit at the point where their route finally left the river. Later the Rocky mountain and Columbia expeditions came to start from the same point and a thriving business was developed in making up the various outfits. Shops were necessary for the repair of wagons and the shoeing of horses. Warehouses containing all kinds of supplies, markets for the sale of horses and mules, and establishments of all sorts suited to the caravan trade of the prairies, made their appearance.

The rise of Westport so close to Independence was due to the caprices of the Missouri river. That erratic stream

destroyed the steamboat landing of Independence. Farther up stream there was a stable bank and here the steamboats went. The place was called Westport landing, and was the true beginning of the future Kansas City. Westport itself was back some distance from the landing. It was laid out in 1833 and grew rapidly, diverting much of the trade from Independence. The growth of the latter town was moreover much retarded by the Mormon agitation which raged so fiercely there for a number of years.

The early life of both of these towns depended almost entirely upon the trade along the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, and that with the numerous tribes of Indians located in the surrounding country. Both were outstripped at a later date by Kansas City, which was laid out in 1838. Westport has long since been absorbed by that city, but the older town still retains its independence.²

Leaving *Independence* the route followed the old Santa Fe Trail for about two days' journey, the points of interest occurring as follows:

Elm Grove, Round Grove, or Caravan Grove, as it was variously called, 33³ miles; a good camping ground. "Here stood a venerable elm tree that must have seen many ages." (Wislizenus.)

Junction of Oregon and Santa Fe Trails, 41 miles. The Santa Fe Trail being first established, a sign board was later set up to show where the Oregon Trail branched off. It bore the simple legend "Road to Oregon," and, as Wislizenus pertinently remarks, "to Japan, China, and the East Indies might have been added." Surely so unostentatious a sign never before nor since announced so long a journey. This point was a little northwest of the present town of

² The data for this account of Independence and Westport were derived from Messrs. John McCoy of Independence and Phil E. Chappell and J. S. Chick of Kansas City.

³ The distances here given are from Independence. They are close approximations. Authorities for distances are mainly Fremont, Stansbury, Joel Palmer, and the late R. R. surveys.

Gardner, Kansas, the route having already passed near the modern villages of Glenn and Olathe.

Wakarusa Creek, 53 miles. The crossing was not far from where the railroad running south from Lawrence, Kansas, now crosses the stream. The Trail then followed for a considerable distance the divide between the Wakarusa and the Kansas.

Kansas River, 81 miles. The principal crossing was at Papin's Ferry, where Topeka, Kansas, now stands. There were two other crossings five and ten miles above.

Turkey Creek, 95 miles. This stream is now marked as Cross Creek on the U. S. Land Office map, and the ford was in the neighborhood of the present Rossville.

Little Vermilion, 119 miles. Noted on some modern maps as Red Vermilion. This point is in the vicinity of Louisville, Kansas.

Big Vermilion, 160 miles. Now known as the Black Vermilion, a tributary of the Big Blue. The crossing was in the vicinity of the modern Bigelow, Kansas, and near here the road from Leavenworth came in.

Big Blue, 174 miles. The ford was near the mouth of the Little Blue. Eight miles beyond the Big Blue the road from St. Joseph came in. The junction was near Ballard Falls as given on the Land Office maps. Distance from St. Joseph about 100 miles; from Leavenworth about 164 miles.

Wyeth's Creek, 208 miles. A small stream but an important name.

Big Sandy, 226 miles, near its junction with the Little Blue. The course of the Trail since the last station has been along the Little Blue. The Kansas-Nebraska line is crossed near the 97th meridian.

Little Blue, 242 miles. From the mouth of the Big Sandy the Trail chords a bend of the Little Blue and strikes the stream a few miles northwest of Hebron, Nebraska.

Head of Little Blue, 296 miles. The Trail left the Little Blue not far from Leroy, Nebraska.

The Platte River, 316 miles. The Trail reached the Platte about twenty miles below the head of Grand Island. Upon approaching the Platte the traveler came upon a range of low hills built up by the winds from the drifting sands of the valley. These hills were known in the nomenclature of the Trail as the Coasts of the Platte.

The Trail now lay up the immediate valley of the Platte to the junction of the North and South Forks. There is no feature of importance en route unless it be *Brady Island*, which received its name from a lamentable affair in the early days. The story as told by Rufus Sage runs thus: In 1833 a party of trappers was descending the Platte in a boat laden with furs. Brady and a companion had quarreled a good deal en route and were very bitter toward each other. While in camp on this island the other members of the party went out to hunt, leaving Brady and his enemy to guard the boat. Upon their return they found Brady dead, having been killed, according to his companion's statement, by the accidental discharge of his own gun. The party doubted the truth of the story but could not disprove it. They resumed their journey after burying Brady, but were soon compelled by the shallow water to take to the shore. Becoming destitute of provisions they separated and started for the settlements, each man by himself. The night after the separation the suspected murderer was trying to light a fire by the discharge of his pistol in order to drive off mosquitoes, when in some way he discharged it into his own thigh, inflicting a dangerous wound. He lay there in agony for six days, when he was found by some Pawnee Indians and taken to the lodge of a chief. Here he lingered for a few days and died. Before he died he confessed to the murder of Brady.

Lower Ford of the South Platte, 433 miles. This carried the traveler into the long and slender tongue of land which lies between the north and south forks of the Platte. After crossing, the road kept up the north bank of the South Fork for a considerable distance, and then turning

to the northwest, reached the North Fork near the mouth of Ash creek. Travelers more generally, however, crossed the South Fork at the

Upper Ford of the South Platte, 493 miles. At this point the road to the trading posts near the headwaters of the South Platte left the Trail and continued up the south bank of the river. This road also led to the headwaters of the Arkansas, to Bent's Fort, and to Taos and Santa Fe.

Ash Creek, or Ash Hollow, 513 miles. It was here that the Trail touched the North Fork.

Court House Rock, 555 miles. The Trail is now passing through a section of country where the rocks have been worn into a great variety of fantastic forms, some of which were given names by the earliest explorers which they retain to this day. *Gonneville Creek*, near which Court House Rock stands, was the name properly applied to what is now Pumpkin creek. It was named for a trapper who was killed there by the Indians in the early thirties.

Chimney Rock, 571 miles. This formation was one of the well-known landmarks of the Trail. It was a cylindrical tower of rock rising from the top of a conical hill. Authorities vary as to its height. Rufus Sage gives it (1841) as three hundred feet for the hill and two hundred feet for the tower. All observers agree that the tower has diminished greatly in height since it was first seen by white men. Sage says that when he saw it the loss since 1831 amounted to about fifty feet, which led him to ruminate upon what its height must have been no longer ago than "a couple of centuries" !

Scott's Bluffs, 616 miles. After leaving Chimney Rock and proceeding about fifteen miles the Trail bore away from the river, returning to it in the neighborhood of Scott's Bluffs. The whole distance was full of interest owing to the fantastic and wonderful forms of the rocks already alluded to.

The name, Scott's Bluffs, arose from one of the most melancholy incidents in the history of the fur trade. The

story has been often and variously told, but the most complete account is that given by Irving in his *Captain Bonneville*. It appears that a party of trappers was descending from the upper Platte in canoes, when their boat was upset in some rapids above the Laramie river, and all their powder was spoiled and their provisions lost. Deprived of the means both of sustenance and defense their plight was a desperate one. To add to their misfortune one of the party by the name of Scott fell seriously ill at Laramie Fork and was unable to proceed. His companions were in great distress to know what to do, when some of their number came upon a fresh trail of white men leading down the river. It was of the last importance to overtake this party and share their protection. But Scott could not move. In this dilemma the other members of the party, absenting themselves on the plea of securing food, deliberately deserted Scott and made haste to overtake the advance party. In this they succeeded, but instead of returning for the sick man, they represented that he had died of disease. Nothing further was thought of it at the time. In the following year some of the members of the party, returning with others to the mountains, came upon a human skeleton in the vicinity of Scott's Bluffs. It proved to be the remains of Scott, and it was clear that the wretched man had crawled this immense distance of upwards of forty miles before death overtook him. How the above facts came to light is not known, for it would seem that nothing short of a deathbed confession could wrest the truth from men guilty of so base a desertion. By some accounts Scott is mentioned as a trader, and by one as the leader of the party. The name is occasionally seen in the early correspondence and it is quite probable that he was a man of some standing in the mountains. Just when the event happened is likewise uncertain, but probably as early as 1830. Irving, narrating Bonneville's journey in 1832, speaks of it as having taken place "a number of years" before.⁴

⁴Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, says Scott was a clerk in the Am. F. Co. returning from the mountains and that he fell ill and the

Horse Creek, 630 miles.

Laramie River, at *Fort John* or *Laramie*, 667 miles. Laramie river takes its name from a trapper by the name of Laramé, Joseph Laramée, as one writer gives it, who lost his life on the stream in 1821. The name was a frequent one among the voyageurs, and is often met with in the American Fur Company correspondence.

The confluence of the Laramie and the Platte was a point of great importance in the history of the Trail. The route here left the plains and entered the mountainous country. The next point where repairs could be made or supplies procured, was Fort Bridger, 394 miles beyond. There was always a stop of some duration at Fort Laramie, a general overhauling and rearrangement of cargoes, and a much-needed respite from the continuous strain of daily travel. It was here too that the American Fur Company connection with Fort Pierre and the Missouri river came in.

The Trail from Council Bluffs, which was much used, held to the north bank of the Platte until above the mouth of the Laramie, when it made the crossing.

Upon leaving the Laramie the Trail continued up the valley of the North Platte, although the rugged character of the country often forced it back a considerable distance from the stream. In fact it at once passed on to the plateau between the Platte and the Laramie and did not follow the immediate bank of the river for a considerable distance. The first important point was

Big Spring, 680 miles. This spring was also called Warm Spring. It was in the valley of a "dry" stream about three miles from the Platte. Five miles beyond this

leader of the party was compelled to leave him in order to push on and overhaul another party. The leader agreed to wait at these bluffs until Scott should come along. He left Scott with two men to be brought down in a bullboat, but the boat was soon wrecked and lost with everything in it, even the arms and ammunition. The two men then forsook their companion and overtook the main party several days later. The leader had not stopped where he agreed. Scott's bones were found the following spring near the agreed place of waiting.

the road forked and there were two roads for a distance. The first point of interest on the right hand road was

Bitter Cottonwood Creek, 690 miles. So called from a species of poplar which Fremont calls *liard amère*. He called the creek *Fourche Amère*.

Horse Shoe Creek, 704 miles. This was a considerable stream with good timber and pasturage. The Trail is three miles from the river.

From Horse Shoe Creek the road bore toward the river which was reached in a distance of eight miles and was followed for eight miles more. This part of the route was through the beautiful lower Platte canon, where the Cheyenne and Northern Railroad now runs.

La Bonté Creek, 733 miles. The left hand branch of the road rejoined the main line between this and

Wagon-hound Creek, 736 miles. The distance by the two roads was about the same.

La Prêle Creek, 752 miles, not known in that day (1843) by its present name. The road is some distance back from the river, but touches its banks twelve miles beyond.

Deer Creek, 769 miles. This is the largest tributary of the Platte since leaving the Laramie. It was an important camping place on the Trail during the whole emigration period. A ferry over the Platte was later established just above this point.

Ford of the Platte, 794 miles. This was the best ford on this part of the river, and was a little above the present village of Caspar, Wyoming. In later years a road was much used along the right or south bank of the river to opposite the mouth of Poison Spider creek, but it was not used in the earlier history of the Trail.

Red Spring, 802 miles. Near Red Buttes.

Poison Spider Creek, 807 miles. The road is now a little back from the river and here leaves it altogether, crossing the angle between the Platte and the Sweetwater. It passes here, although not within sight, one of the finest cañons in the world, where the river cuts through mountains of red sandstone. This was the Fiery Narrows of the Astorians,



INDEPENDENCE ROCK

and it was here that Fremont was shipwrecked in trying to pass with a canoe in 1842. The valley of the Platte here turns squarely to the south, and the main river finds its source afar off in the North Park of Colorado. The river is no longer followed by the Trail which continues westward.

Independence Rock, 838 miles. This is another important point in the journey, for it introduces the traveler into the beautiful valley of the *Sweetwater river*. The name of this stream dates from the period of Ashley's expeditions. A fitting explanation of its origin might easily be given even in the absence of any historic data. The water in the adjacent country for many miles around was so impregnated with alkaline salts as to be unfit to drink. The thirsty traveler, coming suddenly upon this stream of pure mountain water, would very naturally by contrast call it the Sweetwater. But the French name, which was the first given, was not *Eau Douce*, but *Eau Sucrée*, sugared water, and arose, according to Ferris, from the fact that in the very early years, certainly before 1830, a pack mule laden with sugar was lost in the stream.

Independence Rock was a famous landmark. It is an immense oblong block of oval, but irregular shape, along the southern base of which lay the river and along the northern base the old Trail. It covers an area of over twenty-seven acres and its highest point is 155 feet above the level of the river. It is wholly isolated and looks as if it had been dropped there in the midst of the plain. The site of the rock became from the first a great camping place, and the custom early arose of inscribing on it the names of travelers who passed it. It was thus, as Father De Smet justly observes, "the great register of the desert."

The name is of very early date, probably before 1830, and if so, coming from the Ashley expeditions. The incident which gave rise to it is well known, from various references, all of which indicate that a party of hunters encamped at the base of this rock on a Fourth of July and here celebrated the

anniversary of the country's independence. Sage says that "it derived its name from a party of Americans on their way to Oregon under the lead of one Tharp, who celebrated the Fourth of July at this place — they being the first company of whites that ever made the journey from the States via South Pass." As Oregon then included everything west of South Pass, this may very likely refer to the first Ashley party that followed this route, probably in 1823. The name Tharp occurs elsewhere in narratives of the time, but its use here may possibly be a misprint for the well-known name Fraeb, always called Frapp by the trappers. The statement itself is entirely probable. Sage says that "the surface [of the rock] is covered with the names of travelers, traders, trappers, emigrants, engraven upon it in almost every conceivable part for the distance of many feet above its base — but most prominent among them all is the word 'Independence,' inscribed by the patriotic band who first christened this lone monument of nature in honor of Liberty's birthday." This is confirmed by Farnham who refers to the rock as "a large rock, oval in form, on which the old trappers many years ago carved the word 'Independence' and their own names."

While the general explanation above given, that a party here celebrated the Fourth of July and gave the rock its name, is undoubtedly correct, many and amusing are the theories which have gained currency concerning its origin. Mr. John B. Wyeth sagely informs us that it was the "resting place of Lewis and Clark on the 4th of July"! One of the old residents still living in this locality is always ready to entertain the ignorant visitor with an *authentic* account of how the rock came to get its name. It was on the occasion of *General* Fremont's first exploring tour to the Rocky mountains.⁵ Word was given out that the General would be at the rock, as yet unnamed, on the Fourth of July and

⁵ The Lieutenant and Brevet-Captain at that time saw no general's stars in his immediate horoscope. Beyond the achievement of having married Senator Benton's daughter there had not been much in his career so far to give his name wide celebrity.

would deliver an oration. Swift couriers rode up and down the Trail urging the emigrants who were ahead to lay by at the rock and those in the rear to make haste and catch up. To hear a man of "General" Fremont's reputation was an opportunity not to be missed, and there was consequently a great concourse of travelers present when the orator and the day arrived. The enthusiastic admirers of the renowned warrior bestirred themselves vigorously and hauled up the steep sides of the rock the best carriage they had. In this the General was drawn back and forth along the summit of the rock. He then discoursed to the eager crowd upon the greatness of the day. After he was done six couples of plighted lovers ascended to the summit of the rock, and there, on this sublime natural altar, surrendered their independence pair by pair in voluntary bondage to each other. The glorious record of these proceedings was perpetuated from that day forth in the name of the rock.

Less elaborate, but not less to the point, is the explanation given by another local authority who assures the visitor with the utmost gravity that the rock derives its name from the fact that it stands out in the plain *independent* of all surrounding rocks or mountains! After all, this explanation will not seem so absurd when it is remembered that it occurred to so eminent an observer as Father De Smet when he first saw the rock.

It may be added that the Masons have a tradition that the name came from the fact that the rites of their order were once celebrated upon this rock on the nation's birthday.

The Devil's Gate, 843 miles. This remarkable feature is a rift in a granite ridge through which the river flows. It is about four hundred feet deep, with sides nearly vertical, and less than three hundred feet apart at the top. It is one of the most notable features of its kind in the world. The traveler who takes the trouble to leave the road for a mile or so and walk out to the summit of the Devil's Gate is rewarded with a prospect such as no other point on the Trail affords. Beneath him is the tremendous chasm

through the solid granite at the bottom of which courses the gentle Sweetwater. To the westward a magnificent valley spreads out before him as far as he can see, some ten or fifteen miles wide, a paradise in those days for buffalo and other game. Through the beautiful valley the serpentine course of the stream is plainly visible from the silver sheen of its surface or from the ribbon of foliage which grows along its banks. Below the Gate a similar valley lies spread out for many miles even to the mouth of the river. All over this region huge protuberances arise composed of detached masses of granite, the most interesting of which is Independence Rock. Lifting the eye above the surrounding plains it rests upon a cordon of mountains which completely encircles the beholder. To the northeast the Rattlesnake Hills, to the east the Caspar range through which the North Platte flows; to the southeast the Seminole and Ferris ranges; to the south and southwest the Green mountains; and finally to the west Crooks' Peak, which closes the horizon in that direction. Near this peak is a little depression through which the returning Astorians made their way from the forbidding and desert tracts south of the mountains. One has only to behold the valley of the Sweetwater to understand with what delight these way-worn travelers must have welcomed this paradise of the mountains, filled as it was, when they saw it, with grazing herds of buffalo, and water and pasturage surpassing all their possible needs.

From the Devil's Gate the route continued along the Sweetwater river nearly to its source. It crossed the stream several times and there came to be two or three different routes paralleling each other for considerable distances. It will not be of profit to record minutely these unimportant variations from the general line. About thirty-six miles west of the Devil's Gate the road passed through a cañon, where it crossed the stream three times in a short distance. This place was called Three Crossings. In several places the road was forced out upon the hills and back from the river, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other.

The road was usually dusty, the small streams alkaline, and only the presence of the pure Sweetwater saved this portion of the Trail from being the most trying of any.

South Pass, 947 miles. (Fremont gives 962 miles.) "Here hail Oregon," as the itinerary of Palmer has it. This is the most celebrated pass in the entire length of the Continental Divide. Here the great trans-continental road passed from Atlantic to Pacific waters, and the traveler, though only half-way to his destination, felt that he could see the beginning of the end. The pass itself, as a natural feature, is perhaps less striking and interesting than any other. It is less than 7,500 feet above the level of the sea. It is one of the few passes that are free of timber. There is no well-defined gorge through the hills, but a broad, open valley of so gentle slope that Fremont in his explorations was in doubt what was the highest point. As a practicable pass either for a highway or a railroad, it could hardly be surpassed. The distances from Independence and Fort Vancouver were nearly equal, so that it was in a strict sense a half-way point.

The discovery of the pass is lost in the historic obscurity of this early period. The returning party of the Astorians came very near passing through it, but were deflected from the route by the fear of following too closely a band of Indians. They accordingly passed considerably south before turning east. The Rev. Samuel Parker in 1835 refers to this fact in the following words: "The valley was not discovered until some years since. Mr. Hunt [Stuart, rather] and his party, more than twenty years ago, went near but did not find it, though in search of some favorable passage." The pass was most probably discovered in 1823 by one of Henry's detached parties, who are known to have visited Green river valley from the Bighorn in that year. Tradition says that it was discovered by Etienne Provost, and this was probably the case.

The name was virtually given before the pass was discovered. It was long recognized that a pass must be found

south of those crossed by Lewis and Clark, and *Southern Pass*, in contradistinction to the northern pass, was a term already coined and in waiting for the situation when it should be discovered. There is evidence that it had already been applied to two other passes, before South Pass proper was discovered. But when that remarkable crossing of the mountains came into use the name fell naturally upon it, and this in common usage was quickly abbreviated to South Pass.

The Trail now lies upon the Pacific slope and bears off to the southwest. The first point of note was the

Pacific Springs, 952 miles, the first water of the Pacific ocean.

The Little Sandy, a tributary of the Big Sandy, 969 miles. Here was the junction with Sublette's Cut-Off.

Big Sandy, 985 miles. Thence down the Big Sandy to

Green River, 1,014 miles. That portion of the route from South Pass to Green river was very disagreeable, being mainly through a dry, barren, sandy country, in which the heat and dust of summer were almost overpowering. Green river was forded near the mouth of the Sandy. The route then lay along the right bank of the river for a short distance when it crossed to

Black Fork, 1,033 miles. This was three miles below the junction with *Ham's Fork*, an important stream in those days. Before the founding of Fort Bridger the Trail went up the valley of Ham's Fork on its way to Bear river. Here also passes the Oregon Short Line railroad of recent years and the junction with the Union Pacific, at Granger, is very nearly where the old Trail struck Black Fork.

Fort Bridger, 1,070 miles. This was the second great stopping place on the Trail and the first after leaving Fort Laramie. The post was built by James Bridger in 1843 and we are fortunate in having the founder's own narrative of the event. "I have established a small fort," he wrote to Chouteau, December 10, 1843, "with a blacksmith shop and a supply of iron, on the road of the emigrants on Black's

Fork of Green river, which promises fairly. They, in coming out, are generally well supplied with money, but by the time they get there are in want of all kinds of supplies. Horses, provisions, smith-work, etc., bring ready cash from them, and should I receive the goods hereby ordered will do a considerable business in that way with them. The same establishment trades with the Indians in the neighborhood who have mostly a good number of beaver with them."

The post was in a beautiful location in the valley of a strong mountain stream whose pure waters, fresh from the melting snows of the Uintah mountains, and alive with wholesome mountain trout, flowed through the post in several branches, each lined with a fringe of trees kept alive by the perennial moisture of the soil. It was veritably an oasis in the desert, and its selection does great credit to the good judgment of its founder.

Having again arranged his outfit, repaired his wagons, rested his stock and replenished his supplies, the traveler resumed his way, arriving first at the

Big Muddy, 1,088 miles. Following this stream towards its source for thirty-two miles and then crossing the divide and traveling sixteen miles farther, a part of the way in the valley of Twin creek, where the Oregon Short Line now runs, the traveler reached

Bear River, 1,136 miles, about where the Oregon Short Line now touches the stream. This noteworthy stream finds its source nearly east of Salt Lake City, Utah, and flows north through almost two degrees of latitude, when it turns completely around to the westward and flows south for upwards of one hundred miles into Great Salt Lake. From the point where the old Trail touched it to that where it turns south, its course lay nearly on the direct line between Forts Bridger and Hall. Affording as it did an easy passage through the mountain ranges of that region, it was always followed by the emigrants and is followed by the railroad today. The Trail therefore descended the course of Bear river. At the distance of ten miles was the

Junction with Sublette's Cut-Off, 1,146 miles.

Sublette's Cut-Off, or the "Dry Drive," as it was called on account of the long stretch of waterless country between the Big Sandy and Green river, was designed to eliminate the wide detour caused by going to Fort Bridger. It left the main road at Little Sandy, 969 miles, and taking a course nearly due west, reached the

Big Sandy, 975 miles, and

Green River, 1,021 miles, just above the junction of Labarge creek, which comes in from the west. The road then bore to the southwest across Labarge and Fontenelle creeks. It crossed Ham's Fork some distance above the point where the modern railroad leaves it, and then wound its way through the mountains with a slight trend to the north until it reached

Bear River, 1,093 miles. The cut-off therefore saved fifty-three miles, but missed the supply point at Fort Bridger.

Resuming the main trail with the Fort Bridger itinerary the next notable point was

Smith's Fork, 1,149 miles. This name also dates from the Ashley period and most probably was in honor of the famous adventurer, J. S. Smith, although there was another Smith in the Ashley expeditions of this period.

Thompson's Fork, 1,156 miles. This name, like the preceding one, belongs to the period of Ashley's expeditions, and was given for one of his trappers. There were two branches to the road in this vicinity. The northern branch ascended Thompson's Fork about two miles, climbed over the hill a distance of five miles, where the two branches united on the right bank of Bear river. The other branch forded the river near Thompson's Fork, followed around a sharp southern bend where Nephur, Utah, now is, and finally, after a distance of seventeen miles, rejoined the northern branch upon the right bank. The short cut had a severe hill to contend with; the other branch had two fords and seventeen against seven miles.

Continuing, the road reached

Soda Springs, 1,206 miles, at the great northern bend of Bear river. This noted place, which was also known as Beer Springs, was an example of what is found on a stupendous scale at the headwaters of the Yellowstone. It was an object of great curiosity to travelers. There were numerous hot springs, differing widely in character and appearance, and there was one miniature geyser erupting to a height of about three feet at regular intervals. The noise accompanying these pulsations caused it to be named the Steamboat Spring.

After satisfying his curiosity at this singular place the traveler resumed his journey down the river. In about four miles the road parted company with Bear river which here turned abruptly to the south. Continuing westwardly for a few miles the road passed over the Divide between Bear river and the

Portneuf River, a water of the Columbia. This beautiful stream has one peculiar feature which is rarely seen on any other. Its flow is constantly interrupted by low rock dams of very irregular outline, which have been formed by some process not easy to account for. These dams convert the river into a series of quiet pools separated by cascades of exquisite beauty, varying in height from an inch to four feet.

There was another and a shorter road which did not follow the Portneuf, but crossed its upper branches and entered the Snake river plain along the valley of Ross Fork. The distance by the Portneuf route, which was that usually taken, was about 80 miles; that by the other about 70 miles.

Fort Hall, 1,288 miles (Fremont 1,323 miles) was located on the left bank of the Snake river, nine miles above the mouth of the Portneuf in the fine bottom formed by the confluence of these two streams. This was the third important station on the Trail and the first on Columbian waters. It was the first post on the route that belonged to the Hudson Bay Company. Here the traveler made his preparations for the last stage of the journey to the mouth of the Columbia.

Oftentimes wagons were left here and pack horses substituted, but as the road became better known, wagons were taken clear through. From Fort Hall the route lay along the left bank of the Snake. The first feature of importance was the

Portneuf Crossing, 1,294 miles, and the next,

American Falls, 1,308 miles. This fall is said to have derived its name from the fact that a party of American hunters, descending the river in a canoe, came unawares upon it and were all lost.

Raft River, 1,334 miles. Here the California road turned off in 1846.⁶

Marsh Creek, 1,350 miles. This part of the Trail was well back from the river.

Goose Creek, 1,367 miles, part of the distance from the last station being along the river.

Rock Creek, 1,391 miles. The road touched the river at one intermediate point. After reaching Rock creek it followed the valley of this stream for fifteen miles and in twenty miles more reached

Salmon Falls Creek, 1,433 miles.

Salmon Falls, 1,439 miles. Beyond this point the road chorded some bends in the river and at a distance of twenty-three miles reached the

First Crossing of the Snake, 1,464 miles, in the neighborhood of the modern Glenn's Ferry. It then struck across the country in a northwesterly direction with no feature of interest until it reached

Boise River, 1,537 miles, about in the vicinity of the modern Boise City. The road then turned to the west down the valley of the Boise which it followed to

Fort Boise, 1,585 miles, a Hudson Bay Company post located on the right bank of the Snake river, eight miles below the mouth of the Boise. The Snake was again

⁶ At the date of 1843, the California Trail which passed by the northwestern extremity of Great Salt Lake had scarcely come into use at all, and we have therefore not attempted to follow it.

crossed at this point after which the road turned to the northwest, bearing away from the river. At fifteen miles it crossed

Malheur River, 1,601 miles, near the modern town of Vale, Oregon. The road again touched the Snake about twenty-three miles beyond the Malheur and five miles farther reached

Burnt River, 1,632 miles. It then ascended Burnt river for about twenty-six miles, and crossing a divide, reached

Powder River, 1,692 miles. At the point where the Trail touched Powder river there stood in early days a solitary pine tree, called by the French in that country *L'Arbre Seul*, or the Lone Tree. It was a conspicuous and important landmark, but some needy emigrant cut it down in 1843, and when Fremont passed that way and was looking for it, he found it freshly fallen. It became thereafter known as The Lone Pine Stump.

Descending this stream ten miles in a northerly direction, to the point where it turns abruptly to the southeast, and continuing thence northwest the road entered

The Grande Ronde, 1,736 miles. This was a celebrated valley in the mountains, circular in shape as its name implies, a fine pasture, and an excellent camping place. It was all the more important as being the point where the Trail started across the difficult Blue mountains. From the point where the Trail entered the Grande Ronde to the foot of the Blue mountains where the crossing began was about fifteen miles. Thence the customary route led to the summit very much on the line of the modern railroad; but in descending the west slope it followed a more direct course than does the railroad.

Umatilla River, 1,791 miles, near the site of the present Pendleton was the first point of importance west of the Blue mountains. The trail followed the Umatilla forty-four miles to the

Columbia River, 1,835 miles.

Another but less frequented route left the Grande Ronde

in a northerly direction and reached the Columbia at the mouth of the Walla Walla.

From Umatilla the road continued down the left bank of the Columbia, passing in succession the following points:

John Day River, 1,904 miles, a stream named for John Day of Astoria renown.

Des Chutes River, 1,918 miles.

The Dalles, 1,934 miles.

The Cascades, 1,977 miles.

Fort Vancouver, 2,020 miles, opposite to the mouth of the Willamette, and properly considered the end of the Trail. This point is still 104 miles from old Astoria and 114 miles from the mouth of the Columbia.

An old emigrant road ran from the Dalles south of Mount Hood to Oregon City on the Willamette, a distance of 160 miles.

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