

REPRINT DEPARTMENT

THE HISTORY OF OREGON, GEOGRAPHICAL AND
POLITICAL.

By George Wilkes.

[Continued from the last issue of the Washington Historical
Quarterly.]

Historical Account of the Discovery and Settlement of Oregon
Territory, Comprising an Examination of the Old Spanish
Claims, the British Pretensions, and a Deduction of the
United States Title.

[Continued from Last Quarterly.]

In these, Nature herself volunteers her assistance to the enterprise. No ocean is so remarkably adapted to steam navigation as the Pacific. Its tranquil surface is scarcely ever agitated by a storm, and propitious winds and currents accelerate the course of the mariner across its bosom. The general motion of its waters is from west to east, at the average velocity of twenty-eight miles a day. In consequence, the sea appears on some portions of the coast to flow constantly from the land, and vessels sail with great celerity from Acapulco in Mexico to the Philippine Islands, on the coast of Asia. The N. E. trade winds blow almost uninterruptedly between latitudes 5° and 23° north, and with the assistance of the currents and the flow of the sea, enable vessels within this region to sail from America to Asia, almost without changing their sails. Our course to the Indies from the mouth of the Columbia, or from the Straits of San Juan de Fuca, would be Southwest to the Sandwich Islands, and from thence, directly along the twentieth parallel, across. Returning by a more northwardly route, advantage would be taken of the polar currents, which set N. W. towards the Straits of Behring, and also of the variable winds prevailing in the higher latitudes. Having crossed our continent in seven days, we span the Pacific in twenty-five more, and thus, in thirty-two, reach the ports of China; by the same route back, the products of the East may land upon the shores of Europe in forty-six days; a period of time but little more than one-third of that now taken to make the ordinary passages around the southern extremities of America and Africa.

The view that this opens to the mind, independent of its internal benefits, staggers speculation with its immensity, and stretches beyond all ordinary rules of calculation. A moderate forecast may, however, foresee the following results: The riches of the most unlimited market in the world would be thrown open to our enterprise, and, obeying the new impulse thus imparted to it, our commerce would increase till every ocean billow between us and the China sea would twinkle with a sail. By the superior facilities conferred upon us by our position and control of the route, we should become the common carrier of the world for the India trade. "Britannia rules the waves" would dwindle to an empty boast, and England would have to descend from her arrogant assumption of empire o'er the sea to the level of a suppliant's tone, in common with the great and small of the European powers, for the benefits of this avenue of nations. The employment as common carrier could be secured to us by the imposition of a tonnage duty, heavy enough to amount to a prohibition, upon all foreign bottoms arriving at our Pacific Coast. There is nothing remarkably selfish, neither is there anything repugnant to fair dealing in this regulation; we are deserving of one special advantage as a premium for conferring this benefit upon all, and we have the example of Great Britain herself to justify us in the adoption of the rule. The rapid and excessive increase of our commercial marine would necessarily follow this result. Encouraged by the comparative ease and safety of its service, and enticed by the liberal wages which the demand for so many hands would ensure, thousands of our young men, whom the dangers and privations of a seafaring life have heretofore deterred from carrying out the natural desire of visiting foreign climes, would embrace the sailor's occupation, and a nursery would thus be established, from whose exhaustless sources the demand of our increasing navy would always find a supply.

Our contiguity and other peculiar advantages would ensure us the pre-emption of all the markets of the Pacific. Our rapidly increasing cotton and other factories, under this impulse, would increase anew; our extending agricultural operations would widen till they waved their golden harvest o'er and o'er the land, and together they would distribute their products along the western coasts and diffuse them among the islands of the ocean. In return, Oceana, whose trade and consumption both would greatly multiply by the same imparted motive, would pour her treasures into the bosom of our country, and render us, by her liberal supply of tropical productions, independent of the West Indies. Our exportations of flour, at the exorbitant rates which it commands in the markets of these regions, would alone be a source of immense wealth, and, on the other hand, the profits of a new article of import from the Coast of Peru, can scarcely be regarded as of less importance. Guano, but little known in 1840,

is now exciting the deep attention of the cultivators of the soil of all nations, and to such an extent has its trade increased, that from the importation of but a few tons five years ago, six hundred vessels of a large class are now employed in supplying the wants of Great Britain and Ireland alone. It is already beginning to be introduced into this country, and ere long we may expect to see its supply increase in a corresponding ratio with the European demand. Now, it comes to us surcharged with the expenses of a long and dangerous voyage; then, it would be obtained at one-half its present charges, and we should be furnished with the most valuable fertilizer known to man, for the benefit of the impoverished portions of our Oregon soil. The chief obstacle to the dense population of that territory is, therefore, providentially obviated.*

Our Whale fishery and other branches of commerce in the Pacific, would be better protected, and the prosecutors of the former would have convenient ports to refit in; to seek a hasty refuge in case of war, and to obtain the speedy means of redress from, should they be made the victims of the outrage of any foreign naval power. An additional proof of the necessity of increasing our naval power in this quarter is furnished in the late account of the ravages of the Pirates of the Asiatic Isles, upon European vessels.

Our relations with China would be guarded and strengthened, and in case a necessity should arise to redress a wrong, resent an insult, or resist an aggression, we should be able, helped by the speed of our advices, to throw a preponderating military force there three months previous to any European power.

There are other views which open at this stage of the analysis, upon which it will not be improper to bestow a share of our consideration.

The vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean has been as yet but imperfectly explored, and there is reason to believe there are many islands reposing on its bosom whose fertile shores have never met the eye of man. Some of these ocean gems lie directly in our eastward or westward track, and their value to us as resting places and points of supply, as well as posts for the erection of our fortifications, would be inestimable. This brings to mind the fact that there is one important branch of commercial policy, hitherto overlooked and neglected by us, which the course of things now call upon us to adopt; and that is the securing under our own flag and rule of maritime posts in the different fields of our commercial enterprise. We may be told that this is an infraction of our constitutional economy, a violation of the spirit of our institutions, and that it springs from a wild and disordered lust for power which will eventuate in our dissolution; in short, every argument will be brought forward by philosophers learned in mill-stones, to oppose the aggrandisement of the country on the principle of **aggregation**. These sachems have been told in

* "There will be no difficulty," says a work written in Liverpool on the above subject, "in obtaining from the coast of Peru for the next 1,000 years a supply of guano adequate to the wants of the British farmer."

their primary classes at school, that Greece and Rome fell by their unbounded ambition, and it would take little short of a defeat of Nature to dispossess them of the idea. They therefore make it a **primary** object to denounce every extension of territory as demoralising and destructive, and point triumphantly to History to establish the assertion. Admitting this to be the case, though it applied to the Greeks and Romans, in an early age, and might apply to any other nation in the same cycle, it does not apply to us in the present time. We are a new people, in a new era, acting on new principles, and working out a new and grand problem for the benefit of mankind. "History," to make a grotesque application of a common term—"is behind the age." But aside from our exception from their rule, their proposition is false as to its facts, and carries absurdity in its very face.

How did Greece become great enough to **decline**—and how did Rome from a speck upon a hill-top win the Imperial diadem that marked the mastery of a world? Surely not by building fences around their original limits, and vowing never to go beyond. Such a resolution would share credit for sagacity with the refusal of a handsome fortune by a needy man, because at some day he must die and leave it, and might also be compared with that stretch of forecast which would induce a statesman to refuse all worldly power and honours, because forsooth, they must descend to a successor. Nations do not perish in a moment; they are neither swallowed up in the earth like Korah and his company, nor do they go out like the snuff of a candle; they have degrees to their decline, and while it is perfectly easy to detect all the natural causes of their decrease, we have no excuse in closing our eyes upon a fanciful hypothesis, which finds its basis only in the imagination.

How did Greece and Rome fall? Not by the extension of territory as a cause, (though to maintain its extreme points weakened her in her decline,) but by the vices which crept into her constitution; from the progress of those corruptions which are inseparable from aristocratical systems; from ignorance of the true principles of government, and consequently from the effect of unequal laws and unequal representation. The distant tributary, suffering under the exactions of a subaltern despot and his military bands, being too far removed from the parent government to represent its grievances within a period to give redress a value, and at the same time, too far removed to dread its enervated power, threw off the allegiance which only imposed onerous conditions and conferred no benefits but a humiliating peace. The example of defection thus safely set, was followed by another and another, and attacked at the same time by a new, vigorous and innumerable enemy, Rome fell. She fell through her own debasement, and her genius retired before the superior vigor and energy of an uncorrupted race. The extreme extension of territory in an age when travelling could only be accomplished with insuperable difficulty would doubtless rather weaken than strengthen a nation's power, from the difficulty, of striking rap-

idly at rebellion, but where the communications are as speedy and complete as they are in the present day, the comparison will not apply. Rail Roads, Steam Engines, and the Magnet, have "annihilated space, and exploded all theories which rested on the accidents of time and distance;" an expanded order of intelligence has shown the benefits of union in a common system, and though our dominion stretched throughout the boundaries of this hemisphere, with the elements for our agents, and the lightning of heaven for our slave, we could bind its extremities together in a moment, and throw the impulses of our power from end to end, with the rapidity of thought.

By overlooking the means of protecting our marine by the discovery or purchase of those island stations, we are behind every nation in the world in commercial sagacity. France rears her fortifications on the coasts of Morocco, in the islands of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, and by a late arrangement, even plants her standard in the very mouth of Canton. The Dutch own the richest of the Asiatic isles, and Spain rules absolute in the Philippines. Russia, not content with over 7,000,000 square miles, extending from central Europe to the extremity of eastern Asia, has made a lodgment on our continent, and marks the line of her possessions to the North, as a bar to our farther advance; and even Portugal and Denmark, hold their warlike posts in many parts of the Atlantic ocean. The acquisitions of England are so well known they hardly need recapitulation. It has been well said, that the Sun never sets upon her dominions, and that the thunder of her morning gun from post to post around the world, falls into the measure of a continuous salute.

Gibraltar, Malta and the Ionian Isles, give her the control of the entire Mediterranean; St. Helena, Ascension Island, Cape Town and Mauritius, keep watch along the coasts of Africa; she has settlements, fortifications and territorial governments over all the shores of Hindostan, and her power extends throughout the whole of the Eastern region. Further south, her empire spreads over the whole of Australasia;—Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, the Bahamas and her West India Islands, command the entire stretch of our Atlantic coast and the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico, while Canada environs us upon our Northern border; yet probably England would be the first to assure us, in connection with some of our own good advisers, that extension of territory is the sure cause of a nation's eventual destruction. She, however, pursues this policy herself, with the knowledge that it adds to her aggrandisement and power at every new stage of its consumption. With a view of aiding her steam navigation across the Pacific, she has lately purchased a little island in it, on which two coal mines have been discovered; she has not even thought a miserable patch of ground on the Mosquito shore,* too insignificant to seize, and she is now, doubtless, intriguing for the prize of Cuba and the Californias. Russia is ready to devour Turkey or engulf another Poland. Aus-

* This was seized on pretence of it being a bequest from an African chief.

tria has long looked with a greedy eye upon the plains of Italy; and every power on the face of the earth, seek new acquisitions with the utmost avidity; while the United States, as if she had not recovered from the astonishment of falling suddenly into the possession of 2,000,000 square miles 68 years ago, folds her unassuming hands, and with an amiable bow which betrays the modesty of her character, exclaims, "thank you, Gentlemen Powers, not a bit more if you please!"

The opposers of the course of policy we advocate, if not able to defeat it on the grounds of reason or precedent, will find their last resource in the tyranny of prejudice, and the opinion of Washington, will doubtless be appealed to, as a settler of the proposition out of hand. The age, however, has outgrown this species of control. Our notions of liberty have become extended to the degree that embraces the right of judging for ourselves; and we feel no fear of startling the horror of our readers by the assertion that there are at least half a million of people in the United States who, from the new principles which science has evoked in the present generation, are better judges of the effects of the adoption of this policy, now, than Washington, or any other man, who died forty-five years ago, could possibly have been. There is too much of this knuckling to precedent and old opinion. We can benefit by the experience of a past age, without becoming the hereditary bondsmen of their ideas; we can treat its wisdom with all the consideration it deserves without presenting the absurd spectacle of a people claiming to be free, who have absolutely signed away freedom's main component in the **liberty of mind.**

Again, vast countries still lie in the fairy regions of the East, the productions and resources of which are scarcely known to us, and that only await the civilising influence of such a scheme as this to throw down their barriers of prejudice and superstition, and embrace, with the rest of mankind, the social blessings of the world. Of this nature and character is the opulent empire of Japan. Though second but to China itself, it holds no intercourse with foreigners, and only permits one nation (the Dutch) to land upon its dominions. Ought it to be too much for American diplomacy to effect its commercial and social redemption and throw its rich markets open to our enterprise.

The Oregon route, should this project be carried through, would, for its shortness, for its safety, for its comparative comfort and the accuracy with which the duration of its travel could be calculated, be selected in preference to any other by all travellers to the East, or the regions of the Pacific. These would comprise among their number ambassadors and their suites; consuls and other government officers to China and the Indies, to New Holland, to the ports of the western coast, and the islands of Polynesia, and enticed by the facilities afforded to them, many who otherwise would never have attempted the perils and discomforts of the old voyage, would make a trip to the Indies or some island paradise in the Pacific, leaving us as they passed leisurely through our territory, a portion of their

wealth. Add to this source of profit, the toll of the enormous amount of foreign merchandize which must seek this avenue, or be shut out from a market altogether, and the postages which the great number of letters pouring in from every part of Europe would afford, and its revenues would be immense indeed. Yet the sources of all this vast income would be surplus profit, for a short experience would prove that our internal trade, communications and postages, would not only pay the current expenses of the road of themselves, but would afford a liberal per centage on the amount of capital invested.

Experience has proved that no direction which can be given to human enterprise, is so active and effectual in developing the resources of a country as that involved in rail-roads; and without any regard to its stupendous national advantages, both external and domestic, immediate and ultimate, it would be found that the result of this project would justify the undertaking merely as a measure of internal improvement.

The navigable distance to the mouth of the Columbia is now, by the route around Cape Horn, about 19,000 miles from the port of New York; by the proposed route it would be less than 3,000; which affords the enormous saving of 16,000 miles. The natural effect of such a communication across the continent would be the rapid settlement of Oregon, the sudden growth of a great commercial and manufacturing city at its Pacific terminus, and the establishment of a naval station on Puget's Sound. For both of these latter objects, every facility is providentially afforded. Fine building stone abounds in every direction, the best timber in the world stud its forests, the country in the neighborhood of the ocean abounds in favorable sites for water power, and for the sustenance of steam navigation, large mines of coal are to be found in different parts of the country. For the establishment of a naval station, the harbors of St. Jean de Fuca and Puget's Sound, offer, as we have already seen, peculiar facilities for the erection of the works of a great maritime nation.

The cost of the work is the next branch of inquiry that demands our attention. For a guide to an estimate of this we have the tabular statements of the American Rail-road Journal, (a reliable authority), which by a late computation, sets the aggregate number of miles of rail-way in this country at 5,000; the cost of which has been \$125,000,000, or \$25,000 per mile.

As a portion of this expense is occasioned by land damages, or land for the track, most of which lies in thickly settled, and, consequently, valuable sections of the country, we are entitled to a deduction in favor of the work under consideration. The rate of this may be obtained from the example of the Boston and Lowell Rail-road, the land damages on which amounted to \$2,842.47 per mile. We will apply this subtraction to but 1500 miles of the proposed work, and also strike the amount down to \$2,500 a mile, to make a smoother computation. Thus we have

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| 2,500 miles of road at the rate of \$25,000 per mile..... | \$62,000,000 |
| A deduction of \$2,500 per mile from 1,500 miles..... | 3,750,000 |

\$58,250,000

Making an aggregate of fifty-eight millions and a quarter for the completion of a design which will render every nation on the globe our commercial tributaries. This, however, is a most extravagant estimate, and the cost will probably not amount to within several millions of that sum. The distance is very roughly calculated from the absence of accurate information on the subject, and the cost is purposely amplified to secure being on the safe side of the calculation. We are justified in the opinion that it will be much less, by the fact that there is at present a private project before Congress which proposes to perform the work at a cost of \$25,000,000, on the somewhat modest condition, by the way, of receiving a grant of public lands **sixty miles in width** along the track, from Illinois to the Pacific ocean.

The cost of the work, therefore, even though it should amount to a **hundred** or a hundred and fifty millions, is no argument to urge against the undertaking, for it would be disgraceful to our national character to impute to government an inability to carry out a design which is within the scope and means of a company of private individuals. The resources of our country are fully equal to the enterprise. No patriot believes, no statesman dare affirm, that we are unable to sustain the expenses of a three years' war with the most powerful nation of Europe; yet this undertaking, at its utmost estimate, will not cost as much as a three years' war, and instead of leaving us, as a war would do, enfeebled, exhausted, and depressed, its completion would find us regenerated with new life, with our impulses awakened, our energies strengthened, and advancing forward with a rapidity and vigor that would astonish even Destiny itself. Let us deprecate, therefore, from the consideration of this work, that fatal spirit of Economy which has been the Evil Genius to so many a great design.

Economy is the besetting sin of Representative governments. Deceived by its plausible exterior, and tickled with the notion that it is an essential element of primitive simplicity, philosophers, whose mental scope reaches no further than the piling up of particles on the simplest rule of simple addition, oppose its blighting influence to every noble scheme, and advocate it on all occasions and with the utmost vehemence as a cardinal principle. They do not see, or they do not care to see, that the thrift which hoards the seed to defeat us of the harvest, is the grossest form of waste: that it amuses the present with a straw, to cheat the future of its golden fields. They proceed upon the false idea, that the multitude more readily appreciate the rule that saves a penny now, than the design which subtracts one on the hazard of the return of a pound hereafter; and it is through this corrupt and contemptible consideration, this pin-hook angling in the muddy waters after popularity, that we find a prevailing meanness in all our measures of expenditure. A meanness that runs from the remuneration of the chief magistrate of the Union to the purchase of a territory, from the starva-

tion of an African lion,* to the presentation to an Imaun of a piece of lacquered plate;† till at length it degenerates into injustice and dishonesty in its disregard of the rights of revolutionary claimants, and in the non redemption of the continental paper which gave its illusory consideration for the blood of thousands of patriotic hearts.

A sufficient amount of funds can be obtained for the commencement, nay, the entire completion of the whole work, from the sales of the public lands alone. As soon as the survey is made and the route laid out, the land in the immediate line of the track will be sought with the utmost eagerness by speculators, for investments of their capital. It will rise at once to an immense value, and it would not be extravagant to expect that in less than one year from the marking out of the line, more than thirty million of dollars would pour into the treasury of the Receiver of Sales. Additional sales could then be made as the road progressed, to a still better advantage, and before the completion of the work, the Government would find its waste domain of unavailable prairie turned as if by magic into marketable acres.

The road, as it progressed, would be employed up to the point of its completion, by our merchants, our traders, and our emigrants. The great amount of trade and travel, which sets out from this point, (New York,) through the western states to the Mississippi, and returns the same way back, would enable it to go very far toward sustaining its own existence.

It may strike some as superogatory in the Government to undertake this work when it is offered to be accomplished, and all its consequent advantages secured to our hand, by private enterprise; but there are many, and insurmountable reasons why it should be a national undertaking, and not left at the mercy of a band of speculators, whose narrow objects would be private gain.

It should be national, because its objects and purposes are national; and because its accomplishment will advance the glory as well as ensure the safety of our country, and beneficially affect the interests of all its citizens.

Because being the high road for all nations, its transactions will have an important bearing upon our foreign relations, and its regulations will consequently be governmental in their nature and policy.

Because the undertaking is too gigantic for the successful enterprise of individuals, who, if ever able to accomplish it at all, will not be able to do so with that despatch, which the general interests of the country, our views in relation to Oregon, and the ardent wishes of our people demand.

[To be continued.]

* The Emperor of Morocco sent us the present of a lion of the desert, which, after its arrival, barely escaped starvation through the humanity of a showman, who subsequently purchased it for his menagerie.

† The Imaun of Muscat, as an overture for a commercial arrangement, sent us two superb milk white Arabian coursers, with a slave accompanying each. We returned, among other things, a row boat with silver *plated* rowlocks. The pure ore would not have cost a hundred dollars more.