

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.]

Because the immense revenues arising out of it, and the wide domain accompanying the grant, (Whitney's memorial asks for a strip of public land 60 miles in width, from Lake Michigan to the Western ocean,) would create a monopoly liable to the most dangerous abuses. From the great number of its employees, the numerous settlers upon its lands, most of whom it would be able to coerce, and its enormous wealth, it would grow into a stupendous power, which, if not capable of rivalling the Government itself, might at any rate, exercise such a control by these combined influences over its representation in Congress, as would place our dearest privileges at its disposal. As a protection, on the other hand, against a perversion of its patronage by the Government, we should have to rely on the honor, the purity, and patriotism of our Presidents; a guarantee somewhat more substantial, it must be admitted, than the cupidity of individuals.

Because, the object of a Democracy, while it secures to Enterprise and Talent, their rewards, is to equalise the benefits of heaven to all, and the act which would avowedly confer special facilities for the amassment of enormous wealth on any body of men, is in derogation of its own comprehensive scheme. A bounteous Providence has made the productions of the earth equal to the wants of all its creatures, and it is a demonstrable rule that every usurpation of an excess is followed in some quarter by a corresponding loss. This tendency, through the peculiar construction of society, cannot be helped at present, nor can it be corrected in a day, but it is incumbent upon us, whom

a wise director has delegated to work out a system for the elevation of mankind, to interpose no obstacle to its consummation, by specially encouraging an infraction of the plan.

The first results of a private grant of the nature of the one proposed to the last Congress, would doubtless be as follows: As soon as the route had been surveyed, maps would be prepared, dividing the whole into sections for sale. Then a formal, and ostentatious opening of the road would follow. A vast collection of people would gather together to see the show, and amid the thunder of cannon, the waving of colours, and the swell of martial music, some public spirited gentleman would strike a spade into the ground while the wild huzzas of the admiring multitude would make the welkin ache again.

This herculean effort over, the company, after staving in the heads of a few barrels of beer to whet the whistles of the crowd, would retire to a sumptuous dinner to devise plans anew, and to felicitate themselves over the vast advantages they had cozened from the Government.* From that time out, their attention would be devoted entirely to land speculations. The maps would be industriously circulated, and adopting to their use the science of puffing, newspapers would teem with glowing representations to attract the attention of purchasers. The domain parcelled out by the company, would be described, on account of its facilities for transferring the produce of its fertility from ocean to ocean, as the golden belt of the continent. Speculators would rush to make investments off their capital and undeterred by the exorbitant advance from day to day in price, the poor man would hasten with the tribute of his hard won gains to cast a golden anchor in the future. After this course of things had been pursued long enough to swell the pockets of the company with a plethora of millions, we should have no stronger guarantee than what exists in the fallability of man that the work ever would be prosecuted. The whole result would be, that the company who had simply assumed for a time the United States ownership of the public lands (for none but the sixty mile strip would sell during this delusion) would good naturedly pocket The People's money till they fell off from very surfeit; and then, declaring themselves incapable, for want of means, of carrying out the objects of the grant, they would either sell out their privileges to others, or Government, impelled by the complaints of distresses of those who had been their victims, would have to complete the object after all herself.

But supposing their intentions to be sincere and their measures for the immediate commencement of the work earnest, there is yet another consideration against it outweighing all the rest. As soon as the grant was made, plans would be drawn out, and one of the directors despatched to London (as in the present case of Don Jose de Garay in relation to the ship canal through

* It must be borne in mind that these observations, though based on the provisions of Whitney's proposal, are merely suppositive against its theory, and are by no means meant as an imputation of his intentions, or a reflection on his character.

the Isthmus of Tehuantepec) to solicit the aid of British capitalists to sustain the work. Its importance would at once strike all, and perhaps attract the attention of the British government itself, and under the direction of her wily minister, funds might be placed in private hands for purchases of stock. At any rate, there can be but little doubt that the stock would all rapidly be taken up, and the result would be, that British stockholders, and perhaps the British government itself, would control the whole enterprise. It at any rate would afford her a pretext for interference on the score of protecting the property of her subjects. This principle has already been vociferously claimed for her by many of the creditors of our non-paying states, and the probability is, that in a matter of such vital import to her as this, it would ripen into a governmental assumption. In short, the necessary consequence of any private company must be, the introduction into our very bosom a foreign influence that will pierce our continent from shore to shore, and, in a double sense, divide our happy land.

Lastly, it should be national, because its vast revenues would not only enable the Government, after paying off the cost, to relieve the country of the burden of almost every tax, whether impost or otherwise, but afford a surplus, which might be expended to advantage in the gradual increase of the navy, and in strengthening our seaboard and harbor defences to a state amounting to impregnability.

Having settled the feasibility of the work, both as to geographical facility and as to means of defraying the cost, the next thing to be considered is the **time** necessary for its completion; and though our arrangement brings this third in order, it is altogether first in importance.

The **time** allowed for its completion should be limited to **five years**, in which period it could as easily be accomplished by the energies of our government, as it could in twenty-five!

If 20,000 men* can complete 500 miles a year, there is no good reason why the result should be delayed to bestow the monopoly of the labor on 5000 who can only perform 125 miles in the same time.

Our country is as capable of a great effort as a mean one, and we have a right to expect one worthy of her genius and character. We repeat that **time** is the great object! A series of rapidly developing political events prove that the antagonistic principles of liberty and feudalism are fast approaching their final struggle. Alarmed at our astonishing progress, the monarchical governments of Europe are preparing to bring their centralized force to bear upon the genius of Republicanism, and when the collision takes place, we, as the grand promoter and defender of the latter, will have to sustain the whole brunt of the shock. Let us, therefore, arm ourselves against the crisis in time! Let

* This number is not offered as a portion of the rule for the accomplishment of the work within the specified time. If, however, a larger number of workmen than the above could be obtained and paid, and the work completed in a still less time than five years, so much the better for every interest concerned.

us extend our communications across our country's length and breadth; secure the possession of the points that will enable us to protect the interests of our commerce in both oceans and the East, and assume a position worthy of the champion of the world's emancipation.

As many men should be employed upon the work as is possible to be obtained, even if the number ran up to 20,000, or should go even beyond that. This would furnish employment to all the languishing labor of the great cities, and force, by the gradual progress of the road, an immense mechanical and laboring population into Oregon. This result would of itself peaceably settle our title against the world, and obviate entirely any necessity of further negotiation or force. These artizans and laborers having long been in the receipt of wages which they have been obliged to hoard, would, by the time they arrived in that distant territory, be possessed of a handsome competence, and taking advantage of the government bounty to settlers, become at once substantial landed proprietors, whose patriotism and obedience to the laws, would be securely guaranteed by their interest in the soil. Our government in exchange for its eastern substratum of suffering population, would find its broad and fertile western territories sprinkled with hamlets, and owning a class of intelligent and happy husbandmen, who would be the chief pride, boast, and dependence of the country.

These settlements would be formed, in great part, by the artizans and workers on the road, who having built temporary habitations for themselves and families in the neighborhood of their work, and foreseeing that for years to come they would reap a rich harvest for their agricultural labors in the wants of the immense army of pioneers who had gone before, and afterward in the markets of the Pacific, would yield to the love for a stationary home and the dignity of independent ownership, by settling permanently in every fertile portion of the road-side. The places of those who thus dropped out of the line would be supplied by the new emigrant, whom the increased price of labor in our Atlantic cities would have enticed to our shores, and thus the generous spirit of the enterprise would go on, redeeming man after man from the abasement of ill-requited servitude into the majesty and perfection of human nature—lord of the land, and with no master but his God.

The price of labor in our great cities would be progressive from the commencement of the work to its completion; and thus would be drawn from capitalists a portion of their hoards for its beneficial diffusion throughout all classes of the community. The rights of labor would be vindicated by the enforcement of a more equal division of its returns between it and its mercantile deputies, and a great step would be taken towards elevating it to its true importance in the social scale. The annual drain of population to the interior, and the new direction to be given to it south, would at the same time reduce landed property nearer to its true level, and modify that last remnant of feudalism, the

landlord's power, into a bearable evil. These two influences combined, will do more at a stroke to elevate the condition of the masses, to check the fatal tendency to a division of interests and distinction of castes as in the old world; to divide the national domain among **the people**, and thus consummate the original scheme of the creation, than all the agrarian laws, social chimeras, and visionary legislation could in centuries!

Here we bring our inquiry to a close. We have, in the first place, made a satisfactory examination of our title to Oregon; in the second, proved the capabilities of that region for supporting a numerous population; in the third, examined the facilities which are offered for easy communication between it and the States, and in the fourth, we have established the perfect practicability of a railroad to and through it, and following out the examination of this feature of our subject, we have glanced at the most obvious of the advantages that will be accomplished through its agency. In conclusion, we repeat that the earliest practicable time should be adopted to carry out the design. While France and Mexico mediate the segregation of the continent, and while England is despatching another squadron to the Arctic sea, we certainly are called upon to **inquire at least**, by an actual survey, whether we have not within the bosom of our own territories superior facilities for accomplishing the same grand purpose which impels them. The immediate commencement of the work itself, would not conflict with any treaty stipulation, nor could it justly give umbrage to any other power, and in addition to affording a pledge to The People of the sincerity of the Government's intentions towards Oregon, the actual prosecution of the measure would defeat the British jugglers in their design of circumventing our rights by protracted negotiation.

Let them negotiate and let us work, and while they are mousing through the pages of Bynckershoeck and Puffendorff in cabinet caucuses, and solemn diplomatists are exchanging assurances of profound consideration, thousands of our hardy citizens will keep pouring through the gaps of the Rocky mountains, and at the conclusion of the grave dispute, be smoking their pipes in every fertile nook in Oregon.

The railroad is the Great Negotiator, which alone can settle our title more conclusively than all the diplomatists in the world.

Aside from the consideration of national aggrandisement, this project is warranted as a measure of political economy which makes its appeal directly to the heart of every philanthropist. It would be a benefaction to the oppressed masses that would come with a peculiar grace from a parental government to its suffering children, and in addition to its being a measure for their gradual elevation and relief, it would also be an evidence that among all the chartered privileges lavished time and again upon the rich, the government could find it in its heart to make at least one charter for the poor.

Lastly, if the magnetic telegraph should be added to this comprehensive scheme, where shall calculation look for the limits of

its vast results? Basing our conclusions upon our wonderful advance in the present century, it is no extravagance to predict that in less than fifty years we shall behold in our beloved country a government, holding the preponderance of power, owning a population of a hundred millions, with a central capital in the great valley of the Mississippi, commanding from its nucleus of power an electric communication over three millions of square miles, and diffusing its congregated science, art, philosophy, enterprise and intelligence; its enlarged spirit of liberty, philanthropy, peace and good will, to the uttermost ends of the earth in a fullness that will realize at last the fondest dreams of the millenium!

Arouse, then, America, and obey the mandate which Destiny has imposed upon you for the redemption of a world! Send forth upon its mighty errand the spirit of enfranchised man; nor let it pause until it bears down every barrier of unrighteous power; till it enlarges the boundaries of freedom to the last meridian, and spreads its generous influence from pole to pole!

[End of Chapter I., History of Oregon.]