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INTRODUCTION.

Not long since a very general ignorance prevailed respecting the western coast of North America, and no less general apathy. With the idea of Nootka Sound was associated only that of some subterraneous habitations, their roofs supported by cylindrical heads of colossal dimensions, festooned with fish and black with smoke, inhabited by mat-covered savages. The valley of the Columbia was but remembered as the abode of famine, separated by the fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, guarded by an army of grizzly bears, from the civilisation of the East; or if perchance some note emanating from the diplomatists on either side of the Atlantic appeared in the newspapers, or some notice was given in the national assemblies, the confusion of various statements and conflicting claims left but a very vague notion on the mind as to what the Oregon territory was—or what it was worth—what its history, its condition, or future prospects. Now the case is altered: not only do solitary travellers and residents entertain us with their experiences, and commanders of exploring expeditions speaking, as it were, *ex cathedra*, give more positive descriptions, while the untiring pen of the diplomatist still runs on, making perhaps, by his deep and zea-