

## CHAPTER V.

## OREGON TERRITORY.

THE session of 1820-21 is remarkable as being the first at which any proposition was made in Congress for the occupation and settlement of our territory on the Columbia River—the only part then owned by the United States on the Pacific coast. It was made by Dr. Floyd, a representative from Virginia, an ardent man, of great ability, and decision of character, and, from an early residence in Kentucky, strongly imbued with western feelings. He took up this subject with the energy which belonged to him, and it required not only energy, but courage, to embrace a subject which, at that time, seemed more likely to bring ridicule than credit to its advocate. I had written and published some essays on the subject the year before, which he had read. Two gentlemen (Mr. Ramsay Crooks, of New-York, and Mr. Russell Farnham, of Massachusetts), who had been in the employment of Mr. John Jacob Astor in founding his colony of Astoria, and carrying on the fur trade on the northwest coast of America, were at Washington that winter, and had their quarters at the same hotel (Brown's), where Dr. Floyd and I had ours. Their acquaintance was naturally made by Western men like us—in fact, I knew them before; and their conversation, rich in information upon a new and interesting country, was eagerly devoured by the ardent spirit of Floyd. He resolved to bring forward the question of occupation, and did so. He moved for a select committee to consider and report upon the subject. The committee was granted by the House, more through courtesy to a respected member, than with any view to business results. It was a committee of three, himself chairman, according to parliamentary rule, and Thomas Metcalfe, of Kentucky (since Governor of the State), and Thomas V. Swearingen, from Western Virginia, for his associates—both like himself ardent men, and strong in western feeling. They reported a bill within six days after the committee was raised, “to authorize the occupation of the Columbia River, and to regulate trade and intercourse with the Indian tribes thereon,” accompanied by an elaborate report, replete with valuable statistics, in support of the

measure. The fur trade, the Asiatic trade, and the preservation of our own territory, were the advantages proposed. The bill was treated with the parliamentary courtesy which respect for the committee required: it was read twice, and committed to a committee of the whole House for the next day—most of the members not considering it a serious proceeding. Nothing further was done in the House that session, but the first blow was struck: public attention was awakened, and the geographical, historical, and statistical facts set forth in the report, made a lodgment in the public mind which promised eventual favorable consideration. I had not been admitted to my seat in the Senate at the time, but was soon after, and quickly came to the support of Dr. Floyd's measure (who continued to pursue it with zeal and ability); and at a subsequent session presented some views on the subject which will bear reproduction at this time. The danger of a contest with Great Britain, to whom we had admitted a joint possession, and who had already taken possession, was strongly suggested, if we delayed longer our own occupation; “and a vigorous effort of policy, and perhaps of arms, might be necessary to break her hold.” Unauthorized, or individual occupation was intimated as a consequence of government neglect, and what has since taken place was foreshadowed in this sentence: “mere adventurers may enter upon it, as Æneas entered upon the Tiber, and as our forefathers came upon the Potomac, the Delaware and the Hudson, and renew the phenomenon of individuals laying the foundation of a future empire.” The effect upon Asia of the arrival of an American population on the coast of the Pacific Ocean was thus exhibited: “Upon the people of Eastern Asia the establishment of a civilized power on the opposite coast of America, could not fail to produce great and wonderful benefits. Science, liberal principles in government, and the true religion, might cast their lights across the intervening sea. The valley of the Columbia might become the granary of China and Japan, and an outlet to their imprisoned and exuberant population. The inhabitants of the oldest and the newest, the most despotic and the freest governments, would become the neighbors, and the friends of each other. To my mind the proposition is clear, that Eastern Asia and the two Americas, as they become neighbors should become friends;