

which the Mackinaw Company had possessed within the territory of the Indian country in the United States; and it was understood that the whole was to be surrendered into his hands at the expiration of five years, on condition that the American Company would not trade within the British dominions. What might have been the success of this commercial association, if the war of 1812 had not broken out between the two countries, cannot now be known, but this war occasioned the dissolution of the company, composed as it was of persons, and interests, and establishments in the two rival countries.

For a few years previous to the war just alluded to, events of a very remarkable kind were occurring in the fur districts bordering on the Pacific; and to these we must now revert.

The discovery of the Colombia by Captain Gray, led the American Government to seek to establish a communication with that remote river, both as an opening for the prosecution of the fur-trade in that quarter, and as a means of inquiring into the condition of the Indians on the banks of the Missouri. Accordingly in 1804, Messrs. Lewis and Clarke were despatched on a very venturous expedition, and succeeded in effecting, what had been tried before by Captain Carver, but had been accomplished only by Mackenzie, viz., the journey overland from the European states on the eastern side of America to the Pacific. These gentlemen departed from the United States to the northern parts of the Mississippi, thence to its great feeder the Missouri, and all up the latter to the Rocky Mountains, a lofty ridge which divides the rivers flowing into the Atlantic, from those which flow into the Pacific. Having crossed these mountains, they came to and explored the upper parts of the Colombia river, and followed the stream down to its mouth, where their countryman Captain Gray had anchored about twelve months before. Here they passed the winter, and returned across the mountains in the following spring. The reports published by them of their expedition demonstrated the practicability of establishing a line of communication across the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

We have seen how energetically Mr. Astor tried to establish an American Fur-trading Association in the interior regions of America; and we shall now see how his fertile mind was prompted to form projects in reference to the new field laid open by the researches of Messrs. Lewis and Clarke. Mr. Washington Irving, the eminent American writer, was in later years a friend of Mr. Astor's, and wrote an account of that gentleman's proceedings in reference to the fur-trade; from this source, and from the narrative of Mr. Ross Cox, who joined in one of the fur-hunting expeditions, we shall chiefly draw our rapid sketch of Mr. Astor's proceedings.

SECTION IV.

RISE OF THE PACIFIC FUR COMPANY.—MR. ASTOR'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT.—UNSUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION WITH THE NORTH-WEST COMPANY.—EXPEDITIONS BY SEA AND LAND.—ESTABLISHMENT AND SPEEDY DOWNFALL OF "ASTORIA."—SUBSEQUENT PROCEEDINGS OF THE FUR COMPANIES.—CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.

It was after the publication of Lewis and Clarke's researches, that the idea presented itself to the mind of Mr. Astor, of grasping, with his individual hand, the great enterprise of a Pacific Fur Company, which for years had been contemplated by powerful associations and governments. For some time he revolved the idea in his mind, gradually extending and maturing his plans, as his means of executing them augmented. The main feature of his scheme was, to establish a line of trading posts along the Missouri and Colombia, to the mouth of the latter, where was to be established the chief trading-house or mart. Inferior posts were to be established in the interior, and on all the tributary streams of the Colombia to trade with the Indians: these posts would draw their supplies from the main establishment, and bring to it the peltries they collected. Coasting craft were to be built and fitted out, also at the mouth of the Colombia, to trade at favourable seasons all along the north-west coast, and return with the proceeds of their voyages to the great emporium, at the Colombia. Thus all the Indian trade, both of the interior and the coast, would converge to this point.

Thus far, as to the relations between the great station and the subordinate establishments. To maintain a communication between the Colombia and the United States, where

the owners of the project would reside, a ship was to be sent annually from New York to the Colombia. This would take reinforcements, supplies, and merchandize suited to the traffic; and would then take on board the furs collected during the preceding year, carry them to Canton, invest the proceeds in the rich merchandize of China, and return thus freighted to New York.

It will be seen that the provisions of this plan involved many striking differences from those of the Atlantic Companies. Instead of making the principal fort near Hudson's Bay, as the Hudson's Bay Company did, or at Fort William at the extremity of Lake Superior, as the North-West Company did, or at Fort Michilimackinac at the junction of the Lakes, as the Mackinaw Company did, and proceeding thence westward, Mr. Astor's plan involved the feature of making the chief fort at the shore of the Pacific itself, and making all the more eastern forts subservient to it. As, however, in thus extending the American trade along the coast to the northward, it might be brought into the vicinity of the Russian Fur Company, and produce a hostile rivalry, it was part of the plan of Mr. Astor to conciliate the good will of that Company by the most amicable and beneficial arrangements.

The Russian establishment was chiefly dependent for its supplies upon transient trading vessels from the United States; but these vessels were often of more detriment than advantage to the company; since, being owned by private adventurers or casual voyagers, who cared only for present profit, and had no interest in the permanent prosperity of the trade, they were reckless in their dealings with the natives, and made no scruple of supplying them with firearms. In this way several fierce tribes, in the vicinity of the Russian posts, or within the range of their trading excursions, were furnished with deadly means of warfare, and rendered troublesome and dangerous neighbours. The Russian Government had made repeated representations to that of the United States, of these malpractices on the part of its citizens, and urged to have this traffic in arms prohibited; but as it did not infringe any municipal law, the American Government could not interfere. Yet still it regarded with some solicitude a traffic, which, if persisted in, might give offence to so powerful a country as Russia; and in this dilemma applied to Mr. Astor, as one conversant with this branch of trade, for information that might point out a remedy for the evil.

Mr. Astor thence thought that he might advance his own plan, and win the good offices both of his own government and that of Russia, by some such plan as the following. He conceived the idea of supplying the Russian establishment regularly, by means of the annual ship that should visit the settlement at the mouth of the Colombia; by which means the casual vessels would be excluded from those parts of the coast where their malpractices had been so injurious to the Russians.

The whole of this vast scheme did Mr. Astor work out in the privacy of his own thoughts, before he ventured to announce it to any one. He appears to have been actuated by something more than mere motives of individual profit; he aspired to that honourable fame which is awarded to men of similar scope of mind, who by their great commercial enterprises have enriched nations, peopled newly-found lands, and extended the bounds of civilization. He considered his projected establishment at the mouth of the Colombia as the emporium to an immense commerce; as a colony that would form the germ of extended civilization; and that would carry American influence across the Rocky Mountains, and spread it along the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

As Mr. Astor, by the magnitude of his commercial and financial affairs, and his general vigour and talent, had become a conspicuous citizen of the United States, and in communion and correspondence with leading statesmen, he communicated his plans to President Jefferson, and solicited the countenance of government. In a reply to this communication, Jefferson stated that he considered as a great public acquisition "the commencement of a settlement on that point of the western coast of America, and looked forward with gratification to the time when its descendants should have spread themselves through the whole length of that coast, covering it with free and independent Americans, unconnected with us but by the ties of blood and interest." The government joined with Mr. Jefferson in warm approbation of the plan, and held out assurance of every protection that could, with consistency be afforded.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Astor prepared to carry his scheme