

APPENDIX.

NATHANIEL J. WYETH AND THE TRADE OF THE FAR WEST.

We have brought Captain Bonneville to the end of his western campaigning; yet we cannot close this work without subjoining some particulars concerning the fortunes of his contemporary, Mr. Wyeth; anecdotes of whose enterprise have, occasionally, been interwoven in the party-colored web of our narrative. Wyeth effected his intention of establishing a trading post on the Portneuf, which he named Fort Hall. Here, for the first time, the American flag was unfurled to the breeze that sweeps the great naked wastes of the central wilderness. Leaving twelve men here, with a stock of goods, to trade with the neighboring tribes, he prosecuted his journey to the Columbia, where he established another post, called Fort Williams, on Wappatoo Island, at the mouth of the Wallamut. This was to be the head factory of his company, whence they were to carry on their fishing and trapping operations, and their trade with the interior, and where they were to receive and dispatch their annual ship.

The plan of Mr. Wyeth appears to have been well concerted. He had observed that the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, the bands of free trappers, as well as the Indians west of the mountains, depended for their supplies upon goods brought from St. Louis; which, in consequence of the expenses and risks of a long land carriage, were furnished them at an immense advance on first cost. He had an idea that they might be much more cheaply supplied from the Pacific side. Horses would cost much less on the borders of the Columbia than at St. Louis; the transportation by land was much shorter, and through a country much more safe from the hostility of savage tribes; which, on the route from and to St. Louis, annually cost the lives of many men. On this idea he grounded his plan. He combined the salmon fishery with the fur trade. A fortified trading post was to be established on the Columbia, to carry on a trade with the natives for salmon and peltries, and to fish and trap on their own account. Once a year a ship was to come from the United States to bring out goods for the interior trade, and to take home the salmon and furs which had been collected. Part of the goods thus brought out were to be dispatched to the mountains to supply the trapping companies and the Indian tribes, in exchange for their furs, which were to be brought down to the Columbia, to be sent home in the next annual ship; and thus an annual round was to be kept up. The profits on the salmon, it was expected, would cover all the expenses of the ship, so that the goods brought out and the furs carried home would cost nothing as to freight.

His enterprise was prosecuted with a spirit, intelligence, and perseverance that merited success. All the details that we have met with prove him to be no ordinary man. He appears to have the mind to conceive and the energy to execute extensive and striking plans. He had once more reared the American flag in the lost domains of Astoria; and had he been enabled to maintain the footing he had so gallantly effected, he might have regained for his country the opulent trade of the Columbia, of which our statesmen have negligently suffered us to be dispossessed.

It is needless to go into a detail of the variety of accidents and cross-purposes which caused the failure of his scheme. They were such as all undertakings of the kind, involving combined operations by sea and land, are liable to. What he most wanted was sufficient capital to enable him to endure incipient obstacles and losses, and to hold on until success had time to spring up from the midst of disastrous experiments.