

him, assuring them at the same time that they should be amply avenged. With daybreak the savages were seen again putting off from the shore. Then Lewis managed to drag himself to the bulwarks, and with friendly signals invited them on board. Greedy for pillage, they accepted, and once more the decks were crowded. Then the train that had been laid to the powder-magazine was fired, and the air was filled with shattered timber and corpses. The calculated vengeance was complete, but it did not facilitate Astor's trading operations.

The garrison at Astoria detached parties up the river to establish connections with the Indian tribes. These parties were so many forlorn-hopes, who courageously faced the dangers they vaguely realised. A single example may give an idea of the hardihood of the ventures. One of the partners with eight followers had established himself in the far interior. In the autumn a canoe arrived at Astoria, bringing back four of the adventurers. The news were good; the trade was promising, but food was scarce and hard to come by. With famine staring him in the face, the leader calculated that five men might struggle through where nine must starve. So rather than abandon the enterprise he decided with only four companions to brave the rigours of the winter, and risk the probabilities of massacre.

That post was 700 miles from the fort. Remote enough, the distance was relatively nothing to that which had to be traversed by the land expedition through regions for the most part unexplored. We can only rapidly trace its fortunes. The chosen leader was a certain Mr Hunt, who seems

to have shown on a small scale qualities of a great captain. He was not the least of his difficulties that he had to deal with civilized men, who had been themselves to the wilderness sheer recklessness, and whose independence resented control. The recruiting-ground and point of departure was Montreal. Reckless as they were, the voyageurs and free trappers were not to enlist for an enterprise that was hazardous beyond their experience. The older companies were all in their power to discourage them. By incredible exertions, by flattering their vanity and charging their debts, Hunt got the necessary number together, and a motley and turbulent crew they were. He stiffened them afterwards by some good whipping, returning from so many trapping expeditions on the plains. From Montreal they went their way by water to St Louis, the Mississippi, then the capital of western pioneering and the basis of operations. Thence, with hard drinking and excitement, the adventurers started in search of the elusive spirits. So they began the ascent of the Missouri, which a course of 3000 miles from sources in the mountains shed. As the stream was so slow the progress was slow, and the boatmen, toiling with oars and poles, were in constant peril of shipwreck from shoals, snags, drifting timber. Often the narrow channel swept round the overhanging bluffs, where they were at the mercy of wandering bands of savages, armed with as well as bows and arrows. More than once they were in imminent danger, and only escaped by flight and paying the river Indians. For even when they were entertained in villages none