

to the commercial advantage and the political necessity of such connection ; but it was not till 1853 that the Secretary of War was authorized by the President to employ topographical engineers and others "to make explorations and surveys, and to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean." From that time the United States Government sent a succession of well-equipped parties to explore the western half of the Continent. The reports and surveys of these expeditions fill thirteen large quarto volumes, richly embellished, stored with valuable information concerning the country, and honestly pointing out that, west of the Mississippi Valley, there were vast extents of desert or semi-desert, and other difficulties so formidable as to render the construction of a railroad well nigh impracticable. Her Majesty's Government aware of this result, and aware, also, that there was a "fertile belt," of undefined size, in the same longitude as the Great American Desert, but north of the forty-ninth degree of latitude, organized an expedition, under Captain Palliser, in 1857, to explore the country between the west of Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains ; and also "to ascertain whether any practicable pass or passes, available for horses, existed across the Rocky Mountains within British Territory, and south of that known to exist between Mount Brown and Mount Hooker," known as the "Boat Encampment Pass." It was unfortunate that the limitation expressed in this last clause, was imposed on Captain Palliser, for it prevented him from exploring to the north of Boat Encampment, and reporting upon the "Yellow Head Pass," which has since been found so favourable for the Railway and may soon be used as the "gateway" through the mountains to British Columbia and the Pacific. The difficulties presented by passes further south, and by the Selkirk Mountains, led Palliser to express an opinion upon the passage across the Mountains as hasty