

kind. The Chinook was not deliberately invented or concocted by the Hudson's Bay Company, as has been often asserted, but was a growth, requiring many years for its evolution to the stage in which the Oregon pioneers found it in the "forties." The first traders at the mouth of the Columbia, nearly twenty years before the founding of Astoria, were English and American skip-pers, as has been related in a previous article. In bartering with the natives they naturally evolved a special trade language, consisting of both English and Indian words, the latter applying chiefly to articles with which the natives were familiar, and the former to those which were new to them, such as "musket." The Indian words, and English words mispronounced or combined with Indian words, naturally predominated. After Astoria was founded and became the headquarters of the Northwest Company, this jargon rapidly increased in size and flexibility, and was carried inland by the traders, who found it much easier for the Indians to learn than English. In the course of its evolution, a great many French words were incorporated into it, as the majority of the company's servants were descendants of the French settlers in Canada, and spoke a *patois* of the language of their mother country, which, indeed, many of those still living in the older Provinces of Canada, as well as the halfbreed descendants of the *voyageurs* and traders along the Red, Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers, continue to do to the present day. The Indians, among whom this trade language had its birth, were the Chinooks, living on the north bank of the Columbia, near its mouth. From this fact it is known as the "Chinook," though, as has been stated, it is purely of a composite nature, and is by no means the mother tongue of the Chinook Indians. This jargon is spoken by every Indian tribe throughout the whole region now and formerly dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company. The early pioneers of this region became familiar with the jargon, and even now frequently rattle it off as glibly as a Greek professor his Anabasis. It is related of the late Senator Nesmith, that while making a political speech in the East, he dumbfounded his audience by shouting in a dramatic manner a few disjointed fragments of Chinook, receiving credit for having made an extremely classic quotation from the Latin.

Soon after the consolidation of the two English companies, American traders entered the field in competition with them. The base of these operations was St. Louis, between which city and Santa Fé there existed a large trade in furs, the latter being headquarters for trappers in New Mexico, then a Province of Mexico. The two leading organizations were the American Fur Company, and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The former had been founded by Mr. Astor, a third of a century before, and now, under the management of Ramsey Crooks, transferred its base of operations from Mackinac to St. Louis. The latter was organized by General William H. Ashley. There were many changes of copartnership in these companies, and numerous private fur enterprises, the details of which have little

interest, save to show how unsystematic was the American method of conducting the business, and how little hope there was for them to successfully compete with the great Hudson's Bay Company. The most prominent names in the list of American traders are John Jacob Astor, Ramsey Crooks, W. H. Ashley, William Sublette, Milton Sublette, Jedediah S. Smith, David Jackson, Ewing Young, Major Pilcher, Captain B. L. E. Bonneville, James Bridger, Robert Campbell, Thos. Fitzpatrick, and Nathaniel J. Wyeth. These men were proprietors of large enterprises. Second to them was a host of trappers and hunters, those reckless and intrepid mountaineers, whose deeds have been often recorded in border tales, and have served as the inspiration for hundreds of dime novels and tales in the sensational serial papers. Such names as Pegleg Smith, Joe Walker, Joe and Stephen Meek, Kit Carson and Jim Beckwith suggest the general character of them all.

The first invasion of the Columbia River region by these Americans (except those early enterprises previously mentioned), was by Jedediah S. Smith, a partner in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, who crossed the mountains to California in 1825, and again the following year, proceeding up the coast to Oregon in the spring of 1828. His party was attacked by Indians near the mouth of the Umpqua, and only Smith and two of his men succeeded in escaping to Vancouver.\* From this time on the competition between the Americans and the English company was intense, until, after some fifteen years, the latter, having driven the former from the field, was itself compelled to withdraw north of the forty-ninth parallel, which was, in 1846, agreed upon as the boundary between the United States and Great Britain's possessions in America. The details of this competition would be tedious, but not so a statement of the distinctive features of the contest.

The chief difficulty in the pathway of American traders, was a lack of unity of purpose and combination of capital and effort. They were independent traders, operating alone or in transient and shifting partnerships. Separately they had not sufficient capital to carry on business in the systematic and comprehensive manner in which the Hudson's Bay Company operated. The trade was not fostered for future advantage, since none of them cared to build up a business for some one else to enjoy. As each sought to make all the immediate profit possible, the competition among them was ruinous to all, and in a few years the whole trade, so far as the Americans were concerned, was destroyed. In their conflict with the English monopoly they were at a fatal disadvantage. One unsuccessful season with them was often financially disastrous, while to the great corporation, covering so vast a scope of country, dealing with so many tribes of Indians, and handling such varied classes of furs, such a thing as a completely unsuccessful season was impossible. Gains in one section compensated for losses in another. For this reason,

\* It has been charged that this massacre was instigated by the Hudson's Bay Company, but the charge has little else than prejudice to rest upon.