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FIRST ACROSS THE CONTINENT

EFFECT OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION UPON THE WESTWARD EXPANSION OF THE UNITED STATES.

THE origin of the Lewis and Clark expedition gives strong support to the great man theory of history. Exploration of a route to the Pacific in the latitude of the United States was a long-cherished project, promoted by Jefferson alone, just as the sale of Louisiana to the United States resulted from the sudden impulse of one man—Napoleon Bonaparte. There was an interval of 20 years between Jefferson's first efforts for such an expedition and his success in sending out Lewis and Clark. As early as December 4, 1783, he wrote as follows to General George Rogers Clark, the virtual savior of the old Northwest to the United States, and a brother of the William Clark who afterwards was associated with Meriwether Lewis in the exploration:

I find they have subscribed a very large sum of money in England for exploring the country from the Mississippi to California. They pretend it is only to promote knowledge. I am afraid they have thoughts of colonizing into that quarter. Some of us have been talking here in a feeble way of making the attempt to search that country. But I doubt whether we have enough of that kind of spirit to raise the money. How would you like to lead such a party? Though I am afraid our prospect is not worth asking the question.

Nothing seems to have come of this effort. But only about two years later Jefferson was enlisting other services for the accomplishment of this pet project of his. In his memoir of Meriwether Lewis he says:

While I resided in Paris (1786), John Ledyard, of Connecticut, arrived there, well known in the United States for energy of body and mind. He had accompanied Captain Cook on his voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and distinguished himself on that voyage by his intrepidity. Being of a roaming disposition, he was now panting for some new enterprise. His immediate object at Paris was to engage a mercantile company in the trade of the western coast of America, in which, however, he failed. I then proposed to him to go by land to Kamtschatka, cross in some of the Russian vessels to Nortka Sound, fall down into the latitude of the Missouri, and penetrate to and through that to the United States. He eagerly seized the idea, and only asked to be assured of the permission of the Russian Government.

Ledyard set out by way of St. Petersburg, and penetrated to within 200 miles of Kamtschatka, where he was obliged to take up his Winter quarters. He was preparing to resume his journey in the Spring when he was arrested by an officer of the Empress, put into a close carriage and conveyed back to Poland. There he was set down and left to himself. The Empress had never given her consent to the project. Jefferson soon had Ledyard under another promise to make the trip across the American Continent. July 19, 1788, he wrote Madison that Ledyard had left Paris a few days before, en route to Alexandria in Egypt, "thence to explore the Nile to its source; cross to the head waters of the Niger, and descend that to its mouth. He promises me, if he escapes through his journey, he will go to Kentucky and endeavor to penetrate westwardly to the South Sea." But Ledyard perished in the very beginning of his African exploration.

Jefferson's Untiring Energy.

A few years later, in 1792, Jefferson was again promoting a scheme to achieve this end. Funds were raised by subscription, as he had proposed to the American Philosophical Society, of Philadelphia. Two men were to be equipped to ascend the Missouri, cross the Rocky Mountains and descend the nearest river to the Pacific. Meriwether Lewis and the French botanist, Andre Michaux, were selected to execute this project. But the Frenchman became involved in Genet's plottings to precipitate the West in an attack upon Louisiana, then a Spanish possession. So the expedition of exploration failed to materialize.

Jefferson's repeated efforts as a private citizen in the promotion of westward exploration had resulted only in failure. But the exploration of the water courses affording a route to the Pacific could be regarded as a matter of National concern, and we might expect that Jefferson as President would point this out and urge the organization of an expedition under National auspices. A Government exploring expedition, however, was, in Jefferson's time, an innovation. His political principles did not admit of such. But political scruples were brushed aside when his heart was set on a project as a patriotic measure. The confidential message sent to Congress January 18, 1803, proposing a transcontinental exploration, betrays a lurking sense of inconsistency with his political professions. The Louisiana purchase, however, a few months later revealed a startling boldness in cutting free from political professions. This latter step, since it involved the payment of millions of dollars and the immediate doubling of our National area, would naturally be challenged in Congress, when an expedition costing only a few thousand and promising nothing revolutionary would be indorsed without question. That confidential message, asking for an appropriation by Congress for the equipment of this expedition, exhibits wonderful adroitness.

The Government was then maintaining trading houses among the Northwestern Indians. Through these agencies goods were sold to the Indians on terms as liberal as possible without diminishing the capital stock employed. The good will of the Indians was thus secured and undesirable private traders were eliminated. As the act under which these public trading houses were established was about to expire and the question of the continuance of the system would come up before Congress, Jefferson naturally took occasion to explain his policy in the administration of the law, and to point out how, through these Government establishments, the Indians could be induced to provide themselves with the implements of husbandry and gradually be brought to a state of civilization. The substitution of agriculture for hunting would also relieve a feeling becoming intense among them that their lands were too restricted for their needs. But private traders would, by such a system, be debarred from former opportunities. To make amends for this, Jefferson proposed that the tribes on the Upper Missouri should be visited for the purpose of getting our traders admitted among them. Thus most cautiously and ingeniously did he lead up to his real designs in proposing this expedition. Almost at the close of his message he comes out with them:

While other civilized nations have encountered great expense to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, by undertaking voyages of discovery, and for other literary purposes, in various parts and directions, our Nation seems to owe to its own interests to explore this the only line of easy communication across the continent, and so directly traversing our own part of it. The interests of commerce place the principal object within the Constitutional powers of Congress, and that it should incidentally advance geographical knowledge of our continent can not but be an additional gratification.

Organized as a Literary Project.

That permission might be the more readily gained to traverse the Louisiana Territory, the expedition was presented under the guise of a literary project to the nation then claiming that region. Congress responded with an appropriation of $2500 "for the purpose of extending the external commerce of the United States." That the expedition was to be primarily in the interests of science and world commerce, rather than trade with the Indian tribes, is further confirmed by the fact that Jefferson had Captain Lewis go to Philadelphia immediately upon his appointment as leader of the expedition, that he might improve his knowledge of "botany, zoology and Indian history." On November 16, 1803, after the expedition had started, Jefferson wrote to Lewis:

The object of your mission is single, the direct-water communication from sea to sea formed by the bed of the Missouri, and, perhaps, the Oregon.

This is a reiteration of the object of the expedition as given the formal instructions drawn up for it. The aims of the Lewis and Clark expedition were scientific and commercial, rather than political and imperial. Jefferson did not have it in mind to establish a claim for the United States to the Oregon country; neither, for that matter, did Columbus set out to discover a new continent, nor was his vessel the first to touch the mainland. Nevertheless, Columbus is accounted the discoverer of America, and his voyage is held to have initiated that mighty train of consequences involved in the opening of a new continent to civilization. So the expedition of Lewis and Clark, the realization of Jefferson's idea, set in motion a series of events that has brought this Nation into a position of advantage in the commerce and international politics of the Pacific. The voyage of Columbus at first led only to other voyages of exploration, and not until three centuries later, in the independence of the United States, did something of its tremendous significance for humanity dawn upon the world. America, with her new role in the world's affairs, political and industrial, has during the last five years added immensely to the revelation of what was involved in the voyage of Columbus. So, on a lesser scale, but yet with grand import, is the Lewis and Clark exploration working out its train of consequences. Its first effect is shown in a series of noteworthy Government explorations under Long, Pike, Dunbar, Freeman and others. These traced the courses of the main Western streams from the Red River of the South to the Red River of the North. By them the map of Louisiana Territory was completed. Most naturally were these the sequel to the complete success of Lewis and Clark. Coues thus characterizes their work of exploration:

The Continental Divide was surmounted in three different places, many miles apart. The actual travel by land and water, including various side-trips, amounted to about one-third the circumference of the globe. This cost but one life, and was done without another serious casualty, though often with great hardship, sometimes much suffering and occasional imminent peril. . . . The story of this adventure stands easily first and alone. This is our National epic of exploration.

Results of the Expedition.

While our title to the Oregon region was in question and our claim to the Pacific Northwest was disputed by England, it was customary to name the Lewis and Clark expedition as one of four or five links in the chain of our right. The list comprised generally the following: The discovery of the Columbia River by Captain Robert Gray, the Lewis and Clark expedition, the founding of Astoria, the restitution of Astoria in 1818, involving an acknowledgement of our possession of the region; the transfer to us of the rights of Spain to the Northwest Coast in the treaty of 1819. But were these events equally and independently decisive? The naval battle in Manila Bay is recognized by all as the decisive event leading to our possession of the Philippines. It gave us a foothold and brought on a train of events that called forth the desire to possess those islands. Much the same relation did the Lewis and Clark exploration bear to the subsequent events that furnished the basis of our claim to Oregon. Lewis and Clark's report on the Columbia region was necessary, along with that of Captain Robert Gray, to lead John Jacob Astor to plan the occupation of that country with a system of trading posts. The capture of what had been Astor's post, where now is Astoria, led, as a sequel, to the act of restitution in fulfillment of the first article of the treaty of Ghent. In the treaty with Spain in 1819 the parallel of 42 degrees was insisted upon by our Secretary of State as the northern limit of the Spanish possessions from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast. That boundary line left us in possession of the country of the Upper Missouri and of the Columbia. This possession was the result of the work of Lewis and Clark. Thus the Lewis and Clark expedition was not merely one of a series of events forming the basis of our claim to Oregon, but it was the event that carried the others in its train. From it emerged gradually the conscious desire to claim that territory. This pregnant relation to subsequent events can be claimed for the Lewis and Clark exploration rather than for Gray's prior discovery of the Columbia, as no trace of any influence on Jefferson in his promotion of the exploration can be ascribed to Gray's achievement.

Until the railway locomotive and the ocean steamship in the '30s gave promise of the virtual annihilation of distance for the future, our claim to Oregon could hardly have had in view the making of this region an integral part of the United States. Up to that time we looked upon it as ours to exploit in the fur trade and to hold in trust as a home for the adventurous and for the fugitives from oppression, who might here rear institutions of freedom and independence. On November 19, 1813, Jefferson wrote to John Jacob Astor as follows:

I learn with great pleasure the progress you have made towards an establishment on the Columbia River. I view it as the germ of a great, free and independent empire on that side of our continent, and that liberty and self-government, spreading from that as well as this side, will insure their complete establishment over the whole. It must be still more gratifying to yourself to foresee that your name will be handed down with that of Columbus and Raleigh, as the father of the establishment and founder of such an empire.

Hall J. Kelley, who so persistently for 20 years, from 1815 on, advocated the occupation of Oregon "by an enlightened people," thus spoke of the settlement he proposed to make in 1832:

From the plenitude of its own resources, it will soon be enabled to sustain its own operations, and will hasten on to its own majesty, to a proud rank on the earth.

The provisions pertaining to this region in our treaty with Spain in 1819, and with Russia in 1824, and in the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine, were inspired by the desire to debar despotism rather than by a conscious purpose to incorporate Oregon within our National jurisdiction. In the discussions of the Oregon question in Congress some declaimed against holding it for any purpose. Congress was slow in extending our laws over the region, even after a considerable body of our people had gone thither and were pleading for an organization under the National aegis.

These first settlers demonstrated what should be the destiny of the Oregon region. They were scions of that stock that had, from the time of the earliest settlements on the Atlantic Coast, been pushing the frontier west, pressing on to the higher lands of the Atlantic slope, thence through the valleys of the Appalachian system, on by way of the Great Lakes into the Valley of the Mississippi, even to the river and across it, until the States of Missouri and Arkansas were formed beyond. This work had developed a people imbued with the pioneering spirit and restlessness. The Lewis and Clark narrative, as many of the pioneers profess; the discussions in Congress based in considerable part on that narrative, and the reports of fur traders—these all helped to kindle the Oregon fever in this pioneer population, so susceptible to such influences. The route the great majority took to Oregon was in principle the Lewis and Clark route, but better adapted to their purposes. Instead of taking the river connection made by the Missouri and northern tributaries of the Columbia, they took the virtual junction next to the southformed Platte, and the Lewis or Snake fork. Thus the movement through which Oregon was firmly and finally ours followed, as it were, in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark.

As their explorations stand in as strong and comprehensive causal relation to the settlement of Oregon and the expansion of the United States to the Pacific as any single event can stand to a great historical outcome, then all that grows of the facts of our attainment of continental proportions in the temperate zone and of our facing both oceans, must also be arrayed as results, in a measure, of the work of these two explorers. The Oregon trail became the highway to California. Our National interests in Oregon first drew our attention to California and caused the presence there at the time of crisis in Mexican rule of our military and naval forces. The Oregon pioneers comprised no small part of the organizers of the Commonwealth of California, and supplied her with her first Governor. Our stake in Oregon, however, effectively furthered expansion to the Southwest in yet another way. The Democratic party in 1844 coupled its aggressive policy against Mexico with the radical attitude of "54-40 or fight" for Oregon. This Oregon plank won the support of the Northwest. Polk was elected. American armies marched on to the City of Mexico. The fruits of victory were the acquisition of the Southwest. Without the Oregon claim on which to have based that party pledge of the Democrats consent to the extension to the Pacific on the southwest could hardly have been forthcoming. The intense rivalry between the North and the South made it inevitable that the expansion westward on the north and on the south should be abreast. The Lewis and Clark exploration led out on the north, and the south would of necessity find some way of following. Thus, as a necessary sequel to the Lewis and Clark projection westward, our Nation grew to be four-square and continental.

As the only nation of the first rank bordering on the Pacific, widest opportunities are open to us in this "new Mediterranean." It gives us a position of advantage for controlling Pacific commerce and Pacific politics. This widening of National opportunity of necessity reacts upon our National character. American institutions will be more severely tested. Only methods that are effective and pure will suffice us. American talent and genius will be inspired by unlimited opportunities, not only for economic gain and political influence, but also by conditions that favor creations of beauty and the attainment of Greek poise of intellect. The Pacific Coast, philosophers say, furnishes the physical basis for the development of Grecian traits of civilization.

The Lewis and Clark exploration that was fraught with as much of this glorious outcome as any single event can be should have its centennial anniversary appropriately celebrated. And what will be the most appropriate commemoration of the event through which our National attention was first directed to this Oregon, and in which National representatives first trod this soil? That Lewis and Clark Centennial will be the most appropriate which is the means of the largest, highest and, therefore, most permanent good. It should be planned so that its central aim appeals to the deepest patriotism of the people of the Pacific Northwest. The Pacific Northwest is unique in its natural wonders. Their charm for the people of the East should be most effectively utilized. Our industries and commerce should receive from the Fair, or congresses held in conjunction with it, the best impetus that science can give. Our position as the gateway to the Orient should make the Exposition the occasion of the meeting of the Occident and the Orient. That meeting should be so carefully planned the largest measure of mutual good in the interchange of products and ideas will result. The Centennial, too, should leave a monument from which there would perennially radiate for all the people of this region the best light of research, of history and of patriotic love for the welfare of the Pacific Northwest.

Co-Operation in the Oregon Country.

Peculiarly fortunate is it that the Lewis and Clark Centennial is to commemorate the natal date of a natural division of our country. The alacrity and zeal with which the sister states of the Pacific Northwest respond to Oregon's move for a celebration arise largely, no doubt, from the sentiment that unites those that had a common origin in this exploration, and that for half a century were undivided parts of historic "Old Oregon." This common history more than justifies their union in the proposed Exposition. But, in a more profound sense, the people of the Columbia and Puget Sound basins are one, and with a natural development will not only remain united, but will have relations increasingly intimate. Nature has so ordained it.

This whole-souled co-operation in the proposed Exposition is a glorious sign of the recognition of the community of interests that inheres in their physical unity. At any rate, let it be so interpreted and the Exposition will have a mission and create an epoch. It will have a natural basis, address itself to natural problems, unite those in co-operation whom nature has joined, and result in increased strength and prosperity. The isolation of the Pacific Northwest from the rest of the world and the natural unity of the region create for it peculiar problems of transportation, markets and manufacture.

What to Exhibit.

Exhibits of their best products will be essential, but mere congeries of exhibits will not suffice. Investigation, carefully planned and assigned at once, to be carried through the intervening years and reported to congresses of industry, commerce and transportation held in connection with the Fair will accomplish these purposes. Every citizen whose experience and scientific method makes him an authority in his line should be called on to contribute his part towards making this region serve man more richly. The scholarship of the country is available for help in solving these problems of ours. Such organizations as the Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Educational Association, the American Historical Association and the American Economic Association can be brought here and their programmes adjusted to handle many of our peculiar problems.

Events are epochal as they are timely in opening the way for a natural and wider development of National life. Such was the work of Lewis and Clark. A region some 750 miles long and 500 miles wide lay a blank upon the map, except as rivers with imaginary courses were projected through it. The young Nation situated on its eastern border in its vigor, enterprise and spirit had a natural claim to it that could be perfected by just such an expedition as that of Lewis and Clark and such migrations as those of the Oregon pioneers in the early '40s. Lewis and Clark had their opportunity and seized it as heroes and benefactors of the Nation. The heritage of their glorious achievement is an inspiration uniting the people of the Pacific Northwest in a project aiming at the largest and most far-reaching good that their resources will suffice for. It lies with them to choose what they ought to do, and can do—what is befitting their stage of development and in harmony with the best spirit of the times. The occasion, with its inspiration, is our richest heritage as the Pacific Northwest, and should not be sold for a mess of pottage.

Victory to the Scientific.

Victory goes today to those who can combine and apply the principles of science. Those win who get the largest margins through application of the principles of the division of labor, who drive in harness the strongest forces, and who market the largest annual product. The Fair should be planned to gain the most valuable secrets along these lines. That this work of pointing out the way of progress may be kept up after the short Summer is over, that there may be a bureau of research for this region, and that the spirit of reverence for our traditions and benefactors may have an object towards which to direct itself, a building for history, monumental in design, the future home of the Oregon Historical Society, should be planned. Its activities inspired the idea of a centennial celebration.

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