

"WHERE ROLLS THE OREGON."

"A silvery current flows
With uncontrolled meanderings;
Nor have these eyes by greener hills
Been soothed, in all my wanderings."

During a recent visit to the Atlantic seaboard the writer had a very pleasant interview with one of the greatest travelers and most noted political economists of our day, the principal topic being the destiny of the region west of the Mississippi. Among other things, I asked the savant what natural division of North America he considered the richest in those important elements which go to make up great commonwealths.

"The land 'Where Rolls the Oregon,'" he quickly replied, and then deliberately added, "I have for years marveled that regions to the south of it, whose resources are not to be compared for a moment with those it possesses have so easily secured the preponderance of attention. Why, sir, our Creator so endowed that wonderful northwest that children now born will there see developed an industrial world like our own New England, a coal and iron empire not inferior to Pennsylvania, a score of wheat fields like Illinois, half a dozen fruitful Delawares, and a precious metal kingdom whose like the earth has never known!"

"WHY IT IS."

It is really not so wonderful, as the learned gentleman seemed to think, that even such a country has remained undeveloped until these closing years of the nineteenth century. The south and southwest had two hundred years the start in practical exploration, a vast advantage in accessibility, as the lines of commerce have hitherto been drawn, and an incalculable precession on account of early settlement of ownership. The Columbia, first named the "Oregon," was only discovered by Capt. Gray in 1792, and my noble old grandfather, yet living, remembers well when Napoleon Bonaparte, who always did business on a basis of hard cash, sold us all the region it drains, with an additional area large enough to have covered his loved empire, for \$15,000,000. After buying it for a song (which transaction has somehow stamped the region among other nations as of little account) from an emperor who was generally considered able to deliver his goods, we spent nearly half a century in getting a clear title, and permitted all sorts of indignities to be heaped upon its colonists by savage and civilized foes. It is only thirty-five years since the whole of this north-western section of the country was formally ceded to the United States. As late as 1825, a prominent member of the United States senate, in his speech opposing the erection of one solitary fort in the vast Columbia river country, said: "Oregon can never become one of the United States. It can never be of any essential benefit to the Union; therefore it is inexpedient to adopt any measure for its occupation and settlement. Suppose it ever should have a member of congress and he should travel thirty miles a day, allowing for Sundays, 350 days of the year would be required to come the capital and return. A young able-bodied senator might travel from Oregon to the capital and back once a year, but he could do nothing else. He might come more expeditiously through Behring's Strait, round the northern coast of the continent to Baffin's Bay, thence to the Atlantic and so on to Washington. (Of course this passage has not yet been discovered,

but it will be as soon as Oregon becomes a state!"

He lived to see four great commonwealths carved from Oregon, each of which can yet be subdivided into six larger and naturally richer states than that which sent him to the senate; and the Oregon congressman of 1883 will be able to ride from Portland to our national capital in a palace car in six days.

AN OUTLINE.

The two great streams which form the Columbia are known as Clarke's Fork, on the north, and the Lewis' Fork, or Snake, on the south. These rivers and their tributaries permeate the vast, unique and valuable region lying between the Rocky mountains and the Pacific ocean, bounded on the south by the forty-first parallel and on the north by the fifty-third, the area positively embraced in this drainage being 400,000 square miles. All of Oregon, Washington and Idaho and portions of Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada belong to this empire of this northwest. This country with its present sprinkling of 285,000 inhabitants is larger than Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, where nearly 25,000,000 of people reside.

As a great geologist and geographer once wrote: "The Atlantic coast, with its crowded population, its refined civilization, its great cities, its seats of learning and stupendous industrial operations, forms only a fringe on the eastern border of this vast domain."

ONE GREAT RIVER.

The Columbia ranks with the greatest rivers of the world. From its dual birth among the most magnificent scenes of earth in the heart of the Yellowstone National Park, and in the richest section of that empire of western empires, Montana, down through its two thousand-five hundred miles of irresistible sweep to our western sea, it is an avenue of wealth and wonders. For 300 miles from the Pacific inland it averages about two miles in breadth, reaching over six miles near its mouth. Engineers estimate that it carries off a volume of water but little if any less than the Mississippi. Its immense drainage may be imagined from the fact that during the melting of the snows in the northwestern mountain ranges its daily increase for days at a time has been equal to the entire volume of the Hudson. It is the only river in our great republic which will receive deep sea-going vessels 120 miles into the interior or a river steamer 1,000 miles inland among the Cascade, Blue, Bitter Root and Rocky mountains. These navigable waters reach 260 miles into a rich region of British America.

LEWIS FORK OR SNAKE.

The extreme eastern source of the Columbia is Lewis fork, or Snake river, which rises among the most marvelous scenes of Yellowstone park, in longitude 111° within a few feet of the crystal fountains from which springs that great tributary of the mighty Mississippi, the Yellowstone, and within sight of the headwaters of the grand inlet of the Gulf of California—the Rio Colorado. Here, at its romantic start, the Snake is also only a day's ride from its twin torrent of the north—Clarke's fork, but soon sweeps southward five hundred miles as if to gather in the widest and richest field. Again, flowing majestically northward to mark the boundary between Idaho and Oregon it unites, when within four hundred miles of the Pacific, with the Clarke's Fork system to form the true Columbia. It will lead the reader toward a true appreciation of the wondrous volume of the Snake when he is informed that soundings of the

deep blue stream in Eastern Idaho, near the crossing of the Utah & Northern branch of the Union Pacific Railway, failed to discover bottom at two hundred and forty feet. The Snake's greatest feeder from the south, Owyhee river, rises in the silver state of Nevada at longitude 41°, 800 miles south of a beautiful lakelet in British Columbia, from which Canoe river, the most northerly tributary of the Columbia, meanders southward to the common reservoir. The Salmon, Clearwater, Boise, Payette, Weiser and Wood rivers, named in the order of their size, flow into the Snake from the north. The two first named are as large as the Delaware at Easton. The Snake is navigable for 300 miles above its junction with Clark's Fork, and for 200 miles in the heart of Idaho, 1,000 miles from the sea, as well as for shorter stretches in other localities. The Clearwater also affords a considerable stretch of navigable water.

An interesting bit of history illustrating the vast extent of inland navigation made possible by the Columbia and its tributaries is that of the steamer Shoshone. It was built in 1866, on Snake river, at a point 90 miles from Boise City, Idaho, and for a number of years ran on the Snake to within 125 miles of Salt Lake, almost under the shadow of the Wasatch. The venture at that early day proved unprofitable, and in spite of cascades, reefs and rapids in the Blue and Cascade mountains, the staunch little craft was run safely down to the sea, a distance by river of 1,000 miles.

CLARKE'S FORK.

The eastern source of Clarke's Fork is Deer Lodge river, rising in western Montana within a few steps of springs which feed the Missouri. Here, for the purpose of washing gold in the rich field found at this (Deer Lodge) pass of the Rocky mountains, parties have dug a ditch only eighteen feet deep at the apex of the pass through which the waters of the Missouri have been turned into the waters of the Columbia—the waters of the Gulf of Mexico into the Pacific ocean—an operation sometimes called highway robbery. These are those bold enough to predict that the day may come when engineering skill shall give water transportation by way of these remarkable streams 6,000 miles through the heart of the four great mountain ranges of our continent, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. At present their navigable waters are only 450 miles apart.

For a thousand miles Clarke's Fork sweeps resolutely to the northwest, crossing far into the British Possessions before making its final dash southward to its union with Lewis Fork or the Snake. Joined 100 miles from its source by the Blackfoot—a stream as large as the Alleghany at Salamanca—the current takes the name of Hellgate; soon swelled by the beautiful Bitter Root, it is called the Missoula; near the western Montana boundary, after absorbing that magnificent torrent, the Flathead, and the more beautiful Pend d'Oreille, it for a time speeds on under the musical title last given, and when fairly across the British line it joins a vast flood from the distant north it is generally called the Columbia, although many reserve that more dignified name until it has finally mingled its waters with Lewis Fork or the Snake. In that far northern region it absorbs the Kootenai, a stream as large as the Mississippi above St. Paul, and in Eastern Washington the Spokane, which discharges a greater volume than the Ohio at Cincinnati, the Methow, Chelan, Wenatchee, Yakima and other rivers, any one of which would compare favorably in size with the prominent streams of New-England. As already noted, its extreme northern tributary, Canoe river, rises in latitude 53°. Feeders of the Columbia in that vicinity rise within a stone's throw of the Saskatchewan, whose waters finally reach Hudson Bay, 1,000 miles northeast, and the Athabasca, which after some 2,000 miles of northward windings enters the Arctic ocean as the Mackenzie river.

Thus this father of western waters permeates a region so vast in extent and so singular in conformation that it alone, of all the rivers of our continent, joins hands with the greatest water courses entering the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic oceans and the Gulfs of Mexico and California.

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