

size; and beneath these, with a growth of brush and brambles that defy the most vigorous foot to penetrate them. There are, indeed, along the banks of the Columbia strips of prairie varying from a few rods to three miles in width, and often several miles in length, and even amidst the forests are found a few open spaces. The banks of the Cowelitz, too, are denuded of timber for 40 miles; and around the Straits of Fuca and Puget's sound are large tracts of open country. But the whole tract lying within the boundaries just defined is of little value except for its timber. The forests are so heavy and so matted with brambles, as to require the arm of a Hercules to clear a farm of a hundred acres in a lifetime; and the mass of timber is so great that an attempt to subdue it by girdling would result in the production of another forest before the ground could be disencumbered of what was thus killed. The small prairies among the woods are covered with wild grasses, and are useful as pastures. The soil of these, like that of the timbered portions, is a vegetable mould, 8 or 10 inches in thickness, resting on a stratum of hard blue clay and gravel. The valley of the Cowelitz is poor—the soil, thin, loose, and much washed, can be used as pasture grounds for 30 miles up the stream. At about that distance some tracts of fine land occur. The prairies on the banks of the Columbia would be valuable land for agricultural purposes, if they were not generally overflowed by the freshets in June—the month of all the year when crops are most injured by such an occurrence. And it is impossible to dyke out the water; for the soil rests upon an immense bed of gravel and quicksand, through which it will leak in spite of such obstructions.”—p. 99.

We have room to copy only a few detached sentences from Captain Wilkes report:—

“There is no part of this coast where a settlement could be formed between Frazer's river, or 49° north, and the northern boundary of 54° 40' north, that would be able to supply its own wants. The interior of this portion of the territory is traversed by the three ranges of mountains, with the several rivers which take their rise in them, and is probably unequalled for its ruggedness, and, from all accounts incapable of any thing like cultivation.”

“The first section [Western Oregon,] for the most part, is a well timbered country; it is intersected with the spurs or offsets from the Cascade mountains, which render its surface much broken; these are covered with a dense forest. It is well watered, and communication between the northern, southern and middle parts is difficult, on account of the various rivers, spurs of mountains, &c.”

“Of Middle Oregon, he says—‘From the great and frequent changes in its temperature, it is totally unfit for agriculture, but is well supplied with game of all kinds that are found in the country. The southern part of this section is destitute of timber or wood, unless the worm wood (artemesia) may be so called. To the northward of 49°, it is covered with forests.’”

“The rivers of this territory, affords no fertilizing properties to the soil; but, on the contrary, are destitute of all substances. The character of the great rivers is peculiar, rapid and sunken much below the level of the country, with perpendicular banks. Indeed, they are, as it were, in trenches, it being extremely difficult to get at the water in many places, owing to the steep basaltic walls, and, during the rise, they are in many places confined by *dikes*, which back the water some distance, submerging islands and tracts of low prairie, giving the appearance of extensive lakes.”

“The country bordering the Columbia, above the Dalles, to the north and south of the river, is the poorest in the territory, and has, no doubt, led many to look upon the middle section as perfectly useless to man.”

That the American settlers in the most promising part of Oregon, can raise enough from the soil for the supply of their own wants is very uncertain; but it is impossible that they should ever become rich, owing to the want of a market. Of what use is it to raise more grain than they need for themselves, when they are separated from the United States by a desert two thousand miles broad, and from any other customers, by thousands of leagues of ocean passage, to say nothing of the difficulty of reaching the seacoast, caused by the numerous falls and sandbanks which obstruct the navigation of the rivers? The mouth of the Columbia is closed by a bar which makes ingress and egress impossible for three-fourths of the year, and very dangerous at any other period. When inside of the bar, vessels may ascend, though by an intricate and shifting channel, nearly to the foot of the Cascades, a distance of 120 miles from the Pacific; above this place, the river can be navigated only by batteaux, which must be frequently unloaded, and the laden carried over long and difficult portages. ‘Of the two great branches of the Columbia,’ says Mr. Greenbow, ‘and the streams which fall into them scarcely any portion is navigable by the smallest vessels for more than thirty or forty miles continuously.’ The immediate neighbours of the

settlers are too few or too poor to buy of them. During a season or two, they sold some wheat to the agents and factors of the Hudson's Bay Company; but these persons, not more than seven hundred in number, are now supported by the produce of their own farms. The Californians are too poor to buy of them, even if they needed farther supplies; and the Russians are too far to the north, and too moderate in their demands, to be profitable customers to a colony of any magnitude. Their isolated position not only makes it difficult for the colonists to sell their own products, but much enhances the cost of those necessities which must be imported. Cloths, groceries, and iron ware, must be bought at extravagant prices.

A few extracts from Captain Wilkes's narrative, will confirm these statements, and throw farther light upon the condition of the settlers in Oregon.

“For some years previous to our arrival, the Hudson's Bay Company had not been able to meet their wants, and at the same time fulfil their contracts with the Russians. They were obliged to purchase from the settlers in the territory, as well as send to California, to procure the requisite quantity of agricultural products. A demand was consequently created for wheat, and all that could be raised in the Willamette settlements was bought for six shillings (75 cents) a bushel, and paid for in drafts on their stores in goods, at fifty per cent advance on the first London cost. This gave an encouragement to the small farmers, that was fated to meet with grievous disappointment the next season; for the Company was able not only to meet their own wants, but had, besides, a surplus. The prices, consequently, would be merely nominal, unless raised by the influx of new settlers. Whether the latter cause had any effect in creating a market, I know not; but I understand that in 1842 some of the settlers fed their horses upon their finest wheat.”—Narrative, vol. iv. p. 308.

During Wilkes's stay at Vancouver, he met three out of a party of eight young Americans, who wished to leave the country, but could do so only by building a vessel for themselves; and they were actually engaged at this task on an island in the Willamette. One of their causes of dissatisfaction was, that there were no young women in the colony to marry, except squaws or half-breeds. Wilkes afterwards visited them at their ship yard on the island.

“On landing, we were introduced to them all. They had reached the Oregon country by crossing the Rocky Mountains a year before, and worked on the Willamette, where they first proposed to settle themselves; but they found that that was out of the question, as there was little or no prospect of their being contented, and they were now bent upon leaving the country at all hazards. Every one with whom I spoke gave them a good character, except one, and I found that, shortly after my visit, he had been turned out of the partnership. The vessel they were building was a small schooner. One of their number having served a short time in a ship yard in the United States, the rest were employed as his assistants, cutting timber and preparing the plank, which they procured from the cedar on the banks of the river.

“I tried to dissuade these young men from making their voyage; for I found, on conversing with them, that not one of them knew any thing about the sailing of a vessel or navigation. I therefore knew how great dangers they would experience on the voyage even to California, whither they intended to go, with the intention of taking sea-otter by the way on the coast of Oregon. After their arrival at San Francisco, it was their plan to sell their vessel and cargo, if they were fortunate enough to obtain any, or if not to go down the coast further, when they would cross over the country, and return by the way of Mexico or Texas.”—*Ib.*

Speaking of the Willamette valley, Wilkes observes—

“There is one objection to its ever becoming a large settlement, in consequence of the interruption of the navigation of its rivers in the dry season, which renders it difficult to get to a market, as well as to receive supplies.”

We add one other extract from his observations while in this region.

“The next farm I stopped at was that of Mr. Walker, who came from Missouri, with all his family, last year; he did not like the country, and wished to go to California by the first opportunity. His principal objection, he told me, was to the climate, which was too wet for business. He said that the land was good, but only for crops of small grain, which there is no market for, nor is there a probability of one for some time. Indian corn cannot be raised; it was, however, a first rate grazing country. He was a good specimen of a borderman, and appeared to think nothing of a change of domicile, although he is much past the middle age, with grown up sons and daughters around him. He intended to go to California, and if the country did not please him, he would travel home by way of Mexico. His family consisted of eight or ten persons.”—*Ib.*