

which the water became suddenly salt, beginning gradually to deepen, and the bottom was sandy and firm. It was a remarkable division separating the fresh waters of the rivers from the briny water of the lake, which was entirely saturated with common salt. Pushing our little vessel across the narrow boundary we sprang on board, and at length were afloat on the waters of the unknown sea.

SEPTEMBER 14.—Taking leave at this point of the waters of Bear River, and of the geographical basin which incloses the system of rivers and creeks which belong to the Great Salt Lake, and which so richly deserves a future detailed and ample exploration, I can say of it, in general terms, that the bottoms of this river (Bear), and of some of the creeks which I saw, form a natural resting and recruiting station for travellers now and all time to come. The bottoms are extensive, water excellent, timber sufficient, the soil good and well adapted to the grains and grasses suited to such an elevated region. A military post and a civilized settlement would be of great value here; and cattle and horses would do well where grass and salt so much abound. The lake will furnish exhaustless supplies of salt. All the mountain-sides here are covered with a valuable nutritious grass called bunch-grass, from the form in which it grows, which has a second growth in the fall. The beasts of Indians were fat upon it; our own found it a good subsistence; and its quantity will sustain any amount of cattle, and make this truly a bucolic region.

The character of fertility here attributed to the eastern shores of the lake and valleys of the tributary streams, which I visited at this time, would be abundantly borne out by a visit there to-day. The desert plain of the Great Salt Lake, which I did not then visit, lies west of it, and was not referred to in the report which guided the Mormon emigration.

The work was done as faithfully as was possible to us under restrictions of scanty means and time, but it has been a constant satisfaction to me to have had the approval which subsequent travellers and emigrants, and other authorities, have given to the correctness of the maps and reports belonging to these surveys.

In the recent adjustment of our Northwestern boundary with England (the San Juan case), I was informed by Commissioner Campbell that the determination of an important part of the line on the Pacific coast turned upon the maps of these surveys, and it was finally settled by my letter to him in explanation of it.

For the reasons above given I naturally desire to correct where it is susceptible of correction any accidental misstatement tending to lend character of looseness and inaccuracy to the work.

J. C. FRÉMONT.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 1877.

This letter shows two things: it establishes the fact that it was upon my report of it that the Mormon community chose the Great Salt Lake for their place of settlement; it also shows the ease with which recorded facts can be overlaid by loose or unfriendly statement.

In contrast to the facts set out by these Reports and to the rapid occupation by immigrants of the country examined, I insert the following extract from a book published in 1844 in London by an employé of the Hudson Bay Company, styled "History of the Oregon Territory and British North American Fur Trade; by John Dunn." This goes to show the curious ignorance in regard to Oregon and the Rocky Mountain country which at this late date could find its way into print in England.

"Though several parties have penetrated into the Oregon territory from the United States through the gorges of the Rocky Mountains, yet it may be safely asserted, from the concurrent testimony of traders, trappers, and settlers, who have themselves passed these natural barriers, that the difficulties

are so numerous and formidable, and the time necessary for the passage so long, that there is no secure, expeditious, or commodious track which can be ever used as a highway, so as to afford facilities for an influx of emigrants overland. Several routes have been tried of late; and each differs only from the other in the privations which the passengers undergo. None but the wild and fearless free trappers can clamber over these precipices, and tread these deserts with security; and even these are quitting them as haunts, and now using them only as unavoidable tracks. It is true, there have been published more favorable accounts within the last year or two by parties who have made the journey safely, and who encourage others to make a similar experiment. But these accounts are in such a spirit of *bravado*, and accompanied with expressions of thankfulness by the parties for their own success, that they are indirect proofs of the difficulty and danger of the undertaking, and of the utter hopelessness of such a route for general purposes. For hundreds of miles the several tracks present nothing but frightful barrenness underfoot, and overhead scorching heat, or piercing cold. The country, even west of the Rocky Mountains, is broken with towering cliffs, deep ravines, and sunken streams, from which the traveller cannot draw a drop to allay his burning thirst; and the soil is either sandy, in which he sinks at every step, or of a black rugged stone which tears his feet. The travellers have been obliged to feed on the lean carcasses of their animals, which have died from hunger, thirst, or fatigue. Farnham says that his party were at last obliged to kill their universal favorite and pet—their dog—and economize his flesh. He further says that during eight days' journey—and he had proceeded with the expedition of one travelling for life—he had not met with a single acre of land capable of producing grain or vegetables."

Another American traveller—Townsend—says: "Our only food was dried, crumbling meat, which we carried and chewed like biscuits as we travelled. There are two reasons by which the extreme thirst which the wayfarer suffers in these regions may be accounted for; first, the intense heat of the sun upon the open and exposed plains; and secondly, the desiccation to which everything here is subject. The air feels like the breath of a sirocco; the tongue becomes parched and horny, and the eyes, mouth, and nose are incessantly assailed by the fine pulverized lava, which rises from the ground with the least breath of air. Bullets, pebbles of chalcedony, and pieces of smooth obsidian were in great requisition; almost every man was mumbling some of these substances in an endeavor to assuage his burning thirst. The lead bullets and the other substances which they chewed were for the purpose of producing spittle, which they would swallow to prevent inflammation and death. There are, however, certain declinations called *gaps* through which (though with great labor) a tedious and dreary passage can be effected. The most frequented of these is the most northern,



between Mounts Brown and Hooker, through which the company's servants pass in their journey from Columbia to Hudson's Bay. This is, comparatively, an easy passage. There is another between the head-waters of the Flathead and Marias Rivers; another between Lewis and Clarke's River, in the Oregon, and the sources of the Missouri; and another, which is very important, lies between Long's Mountains and the Wind River cluster."

At the instance of General Scott I was given the double brevet of first lieutenant and captain. He made my services the subject of a special report, which consisted of two parts: the first, an argument that a double brevet, under existing law, might be granted; the second, that in consideration of services rendered by me it ought to be granted. The fact that General Scott was known to be tenacious of military observances increased the value of his recommendation. Accordingly, I was appointed by President Tyler captain by brevet, "to rank as such from the 31st day of July, 1844: for gallant and highly meritorious services in two expeditions commanded by himself; the first to the Rocky Mountains, which terminated October 17, 1842; and the second beyond those mountains, which terminated July 31, 1844."

This brevet has the greater value for me because it is the only recognition for "services rendered" that I have received from my own Government.

After the change of administration in March I accompanied Mr. Benton to visit the President, Mr. Polk. In speaking to him of the interesting facts in the geography of the West I mentioned that I had shortly before, at the Library of Congress, drawn out from the map-stand one giving the United States and Territories, and found on it the Great Salt Lake represented as connected with the Pacific Ocean by three great rivers: one discharging into the Columbia River from the northwestern end; another from the southwestern end into the head of the Gulf of California; the third from the middle of the western side of the lake running westward, breaking through the Sierra Nevada and discharging into the Bay of San Francisco. Bearing in mind the account given me at Vancouver of the Buenaventura River, the known fact of the Great Colorado, and the existence of large streams flowing into the lake, it is easy to see how the reports of trappers scattered over that region, who had seen it only in widely separated parts, might be connected together in the compilation of maps so as to give the lake these outlets.

The President seemed for the moment sceptical about the exactness of my information and disposed to be conservative. He evidently "respected that ancient chaos" of the western geography as it existed on the old maps. Like the Secretary, he found me "young," and said something of the

"impulsiveness of young men," and was not at all satisfied in his own mind that those three rivers were not running there as laid down.

It may be remembered that Alexis Ayot was severely wounded at the frontier, just when reaching the end of the journey. As an evidence of the interest felt in the expeditions, I anticipate here to say in what way he was not lost sight of. He was a French Canadian, young, and with simple faith in "government." He believed, that, as he had been crippled in its service, he only needed to show himself in Washington to be provided for. To his surprise and distress he was told that as he was not an enlisted soldier the pension laws could not apply to him. "*Je vais mourir de faim*," he said to Mrs. Frémont; "*je ne suis pas clerc, je n'avais que mes jambes*." That evening Mrs. Frémont was telling of this disappointment to herself as well as to the poor voyageur to Mrs. Dix, a charming, sympathetic woman with whom as with her husband the family intimacy was great. A large, rather bashful gentleman waiting to see Mr. Dix sat apart taking no share in the talk of the two ladies; but after he had made his visit to the Senator, Mr. Dix came in from his library to say that this was the chairman of the Committee on Pensions; that he had been so interested for the crippled man that he had asked him to say that if Mrs. Frémont would write out briefly—just as she told it—the man's case, he thought he could help him. This was Preston King, of New York.

He made good his offer. A special act was introduced by Mr. King for his relief, and within a few days it had gone through both houses, received the signature of President Polk, and Ayot found himself with not only his pension, but back pay from the date of his wound. Swaying on his crutches he tried to thank Mrs. Frémont, and with tears running down his dark face said, "I cannot kneel to thank you—*je n'ai plus de jambes*—but you are my *Sainte Madonne* et je vous fais ma prière." To draw his pension he had to become an American resident. He was thorough; becoming also a citizen and marrying an American girl. And as a shoemaker in Montpelier, Vermont, I learned of his friendly arguments, and his voting for me there, many years after.

I had returned inspired with California. Its delightful climate and uncommon beauty of surface; the great strength of its vegetation and its grand commercial position; took possession of my mind. My wish when I first saw it settled into intention, and I determined to make there a home.

With all these advantages it was unused. Its great forests and fertile lands, the fish that crowded its waters, the noble harbor and great commerce that waited for it, were all unused; lying waste like an Indian country, as in greater part it was. Its fertile sea-board was one great stock-



farm and its whole population only a few thousands ; so far distant from the Central Government that it was ready at any moment to break off. It had now come to share the great interest which the men in control of affairs at Washington had felt for the more northern coast of the Pacific. Mr. Webster invited me to dine with him "to talk about California." I found that his mind was specially fixed upon the Bay of San Francisco and the commanding advantage it would give us for war and commerce. He drew his line, however, at the coast. Coming as he did from a part of our country where grass contends with rocks for possession of the fields, it was difficult to make him realize the wonderful fertility of the unobstructed soil of California, where wild oats make unbroken fields from valley to mountain-top. For him the Rocky Mountains extended the influence of their name to the sea-beaches and mingled their rocks with the sands; making in his mind the picture which he afterward gave of California: "a strip of sandy land along the Pacific Ocean with here and there an oasis of fertile soil; offering no inducements for us except the fine harbors indented upon its coast."

What Mr. Webster thought of these harbors he says in a letter written to his son March 11, 1845, quoted by Mr. George Ticknor Curtis in his well-studied and admirable life of Buchanan. In this letter Mr. Webster is speaking of the improbability that England would go to war with us to prevent the annexation of Texas. "But," he says, "she will now take care that Mexico shall not cede California, or any part thereof, to us. You know my opinion to have been, and now is, that the port of San Francisco would be twenty times as valuable to us as all Texas."

I communicated my inspiration to others. For this Mr. Benton's mind was open. Many clients from among old Spanish families in Florida and Louisiana ; his practice in defending their interests ; the knowledge acquired of the usage as well as the laws under which their old land grants had been held ; his knowledge of the language which led to friendships with his clients ; all gave him unusual interest now in Mexico. Out of this had come his sympathy for them as a people. He had always held that toward Mexico our relation should be that of the Great Republic aiding a neighboring state in its early struggles ; and he belonged with those who preferred the acquiring of Texas by treaty and purchase, not by war. This he opposed and denounced. He came now to hold the same views concerning California.

President Polk entered on his office with a fixed determination to acquire California, if he could acquire it in an honorable and just manner.

The President and Mr. Bancroft held it impossible for Mexico, situated as things then were, to retain possession of California ; and therefore it was right to negotiate with Mexico for the acquisition of that which to her could be of no use. This it was hoped to accomplish by peaceful negotiation ;

but if Mexico in resenting our acceptance of the offer of Texas to join us, should begin a war with us, then, by taking possession of the province.

To acquire California by all honorable means had been the desire of Mr. Bancroft much before this time, but the relations with Mexico growing out of the Texas situation soon became critical and threatened war ; leaving no room for further negotiation.

The Secretary of State, Mr. Buchanan, and Senator Dix, of New York, came frequently to confer with Senator Benton. As chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs he was the centre of information and conference. Mr. Buchanan had discovered a leak in his Department, and not knowing the Spanish language himself brought his confidential letters and documents from Mexico to be read to him by Mr. Dix and Mr. Benton, who knew the language well. Mr. Dix was a near neighbor for the whole of his senatorial term, a member of the Military Committee and also personally intimate with Mr. Benton from similarity of tastes. In the security of Mr. Benton's library these despatches were read and discussed and many translations made for Mr. Buchanan's use by Mrs. Frémont and her elder sister. Baron Gerolt, the Prussian Minister, who had been for twenty years Minister to Mexico and who had now his continued confidential relations with chief men in that country, was also our valued friend ; with a friendship uninterrupted while he lived. From his outset in life Humboldt had been his friend and watched over his career. He had been chosen by him for the mission to Mexico, and during his long absence abroad their friendly correspondence had been maintained.

The following letter to Mr. Buchanan from Mr. Bancroft gives the state of affairs from authentic information and shows the friendly interest of Baron Gerolt:

WASHINGTON, August 7, 1845.

MY DEAR MR. BUCHANAN :

You remember what I told you, before you left, that Baron Gerolt predicted war on the part of Mexico. Yesterday morning, at the President's request, I went to see him, and found him very ready to communicate all his intelligence, concealing only the name of his informant, and desiring that his own name may not be used.

His letters came by way of Havana, and Charleston, S. C., and are from Mexico City, of the date of June 28th. He vouches for the entire authenticity and good opportunity of information on the part of his correspondent.

General Arista, with three thousand men, chiefly cavalry, himself the best cavalry officer in Mexico, had been directed to move forward towards the Del Norte ; but whether he had orders to cross the Del Norte was not said.



At San Louis Potosi, General Paredes, the commander-in-chief, had his general quarters, with an army of seven thousand men. These also were directed to move forward, in small divisions, towards the Del Norte.

From Mexico City, General Felisola, the old woman who was with Santa Anna in Texas, was soon to leave with three thousand men to join the army of Paredes.

Thus far positive information. It was stated by the Baron as his *opinion* that Mexico would certainly consider the armistice with Texas broken by the action of the Texas convention; that she would shun battles and carry on an annoying guerilla warfare; that she would protract the war into a very expensive length; that she would agree to no settlement of boundary with us, but under the guarantee of European powers.

On these opinions I make no comment. The seemingly authentic news of hostile intentions has led Governor Marcy, under proper sanctions, to increase his little army in Texas, and Mr. Mason has written all the necessary letters. I do not see but that the sun rises this morning much as usual. The President, too, is in excellent spirits, and will grow fat in your absence, he sleeps so well *now*, and sees nothing before him but the plain, though steep and arduous path of duty.

So wishing you well,  
Your faithful friend,  
GEORGE BANCROFT.

Of his solicitude for my personal welfare Baron Gerolt gave a marked proof during my absence on the third expedition, by coming to Mr. Benton to warn him that I would be in danger from an unexpected quarter in California; for he had received positive information from the City of Mexico that orders had been sent by the Mexican Government to the commanding general of that Department directing him to drive me from any part of the territory in which I might appear.

Concurrently with the Report upon the second expedition the plans and scope of a third one had been matured. It was decided that it should be directed to that section of the Rocky Mountains which gives rise to the Arkansas River, the Rio Grande del Norte of the Gulf of Mexico, and the Rio Colorado of the Gulf of California; to complete the examination of the Great Salt Lake and its interesting region; and to extend the survey west and southwest to the examination of the great ranges of the Cascade Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, so as to ascertain the lines of communication through the mountains to the ocean in that latitude. And in arranging this expedition, the eventualities of war were taken into consideration.

The geographical examinations proposed to be made were in greater part in Mexican territory. This was the situation: Texas was gone and



UPPER SACRAMENTO VALLEY.