CHAPTER V.

EARLY AMERICAN EXPLORATIONS IN RED RIVER VALLEY.


MAJOR LONG’S EXPEDITION OF 1823.

In the spring, summer, and fall of 1823, pursuant to orders from the War Department, a miscellaneous expedition, under the command of Maj. Stephen H. Long, with a corps of scientists for observations of a general character, went from Washington to and through a considerable portion of the Northwest, including the Red River Valley and a great deal of northern Minnesota. Coming into the Minnesota country in July, the expedition passed from Fort Snelling up the Minnesota Valley to Lake Winnipeg (then called Winnipeek) thence up the Winnipeg River to the Lake of the Woods and thence eastward along the Canadian boundary to Lake Superior. A very interesting and valuable history of the expedition was written by Prof. Wm. H. Keating, its geologist, recorder, and historian.

The expedition left Fort Snelling for the ascent of the Minnesota in the latter part of July, 1823, and comprised two small parties, one on horseback riding along the shores, and the other up the river in boats. Lake Traverse was reached July 23, and here three days were spent with the authorities of the Columbia Fur Company, at their main post. They struck the Red Lake River a few miles from its mouth, and found their position to be latitude 47 degrees, 47 minutes, and 25 seconds north, and longitude 96 degrees, 53 minutes, and 45 seconds west. Keating calls the river “the Red Fork of Red River,” and says that where the party forded it the width was forty yards. Its banks were steep, and the carts were crossed with difficulty; its bed was sandy and its current very rapid. The party went along the east bank of the river to Pembina, which was reached August 5. The village—or rather settlement—of Pembina had then a population of 350, most of whom were Metis, or half bloods, and who lived in 60 log houses or cabins, nearly all of which stood on the west bank, adjacent to a former fort of the Hudson’s Bay Company, which had been recently abandoned.

It will be borne in mind that the Hudson’s Bay Company originally claimed the country of the Red River Valley as far up as the “Red Fork,” or Red Lake River. In 1812 the Company granted to Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, for his colony, the country of the Valley, including both banks of the Red River, “up to the Red or Great Fork,” assuming ownership and control to that extent. But when, after the War of 1812, the international boundary line was established, as a result of the successful issue in 1781 of their War for Independence, the Americans acquired