

five years later it became the seat of justice for Erie county, though it was the year 1803 before the first court was held there. In 1805, it was incorporated as a borough, and in 1813, it became famous in the annals of the country, as the point where Perry built his fleet,* and from which he went forth upon that victorious expedition, the results of which he himself commemorated in his celebrated laconic message: "We have met the enemy, and they are ours."

The situation of Erie is exceedingly picturesque, and as beautiful as that of any city in the West. The population is between eight and ten thousand.

This year, like the year 1811, was throughout one full of disasters [1854.] and gloomy incidents, of which the heaviest portion fell upon the West.

The first and chief cause of distress was the exceeding heat and drought, and the consequent scarcity of provisions. In the early spring the season opened with sufficient promise, but as the summer advanced, there was a total absence of all rain; the ground became parched; the creeks and small water courses dried up, and many of the rivers became lower than they had been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitants. At the same time the heat was excessive. Everything was suffering for want of water; the grain became shriveled up and dried, and failed to produce crops; vegetables would not come to perfection, or became unhealthy, for the want of proper or ample nourishment to develop them; and even the cattle, in many sections of country, had to be sacrificed, on account of the scarcity of pasture and water, and the consequent impossibility of keeping them. Many farmers were obliged to drive the few cattle that they retained, several miles from home, to the rivers to get water. It was a season of unexampled drought.

In consequence, the prices of flour, produce and other necessaries became very far higher than had ever been known in the West, and the suffering among the poor was terrible.

Very much of the distress produced by the failure of crops this year, might no doubt have been saved, if the American people were more disposed to guard their agricultural interests. But it is greatly to be deplored that, both East and West, there is prevalent in our country a disposition to neglect that noblest, happiest

* See ante, page 901.