

These territories, unoccupied, partially explored, and remote from all civilized countries, nevertheless present much that is interesting in their political history, as well as in their natural conformation and productions ; and events are now in progress which seem calculated, ere long, to attract towards them the views of the governments and people of many powerful nations.

Every part of this division of America is in fact claimed by some civilized state as its exclusive property, in virtue either of discoveries or settlements made by its citizens or subjects, or of transfer or inheritance from some other state claiming on similar grounds, or of contiguity to its own acknowledged territories. On these points, the principles of national law are by no means clearly defined ; nor is it easy to apply such as are most generally admitted, to particular cases ; nor are governments ordinarily found ready to relinquish claims merely because they prove to be unfounded, agreeably to such principles : and disputes have in consequence arisen between different nations asserting the right of possession to the same portion of Western America, which have more than once threatened to disturb the peace of the world. Attempts have been made to settle the questions at issue by negotiation ; and certain lines of boundary have been agreed on by treaties between one and another of the claimant powers : but the arrangements thus made, can scarcely in any instance be considered definitive, as they have not received, and will probably never receive, the assent of the other parties interested.

In the mean time these territories are daily becoming more important from the advancement of the population of adjoining countries towards them, and from the constant increase of the trade and navigation of several of the claimant powers in the Pacific, which would render the undisputed possession of establishments on the coasts of that Ocean most desirable for each. The difficulty of effecting an amicable partition of the territories thus becomes daily