

in a pressure of population which began on the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico.

But this Oregon was not the present little State which now lies below $46^{\circ} 15'$ North latitude. It was that enormous territory which extends between the parallels of 42° and $54^{\circ} 40'$. It included all that area between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific, between Alaska on the north, and California on the south, an area of 400,000 square miles, drained by such rivers as the Columbia, the Fraser, and the Skeena. The attitude of the United States was well expressed by Stephen A. Douglas, when he declared May 13th, 1864—"I am as ready and willing to fight for $54^{\circ} 40'$ as for the Rio del Norte." When President Polk declared in his inaugural message for the whole of Oregon, both countries were on the verge of war.

No one contended that the title of Great Britain to this region was incontestable. Spain had a claim on the ground of priority of discovery, though discovery, unattended by permanent occupation and settlement, constitutes the lowest degree of title; and the only right which Great Britain secured from Spain was that which was conceded under the Nootka Convention of 1790, and confirmed by the Treaty of Madrid in 1814, that British subjects might settle and trade in the territory north of California. This arrangement was made in the interests of fur traders who formed the North-West Company, and its successor the Hudson's Bay Company; but such occupation was a precarious one upon which to found a title.

On the other hand, the United States was in possession of certain claims which had to be considered unless war was to be declared, quite apart from the right or wrong of the case. They were successors in title to Spain, which, by the Treaty of Florida in 1819, had ceded all her claims to territory north of 42° . They were successors to France under the Louisiana Purchase to any title which she might have possessed; and there is no doubt that Gray, the master of the United States trading vessel, was the first to sail upon the Columbia River, knowing it to be a river, and that Lewis