

'1825.' Before quoting the language of the treaty, it may be well briefly to recall the circumstances which led to its negotiation.

Scarce two hundred years have elapsed since the advance guard of the Cossack horde commissioned by Peter the Great to explore and conquer the north-eastern portion of Asia reached Kamschatka and penetrated to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Within fifteen years thereafter the whole of this immense region was incorporated in the Russian Empire. These vast acquisitions served but to incite the ambitious Czar to further conquest. Vessels were built at Kamschatka by his command, and expeditions led forth by Behring, Tchiricoff, and other explorers, planted the Russian flag at various places along the north-west coast of America. The Russian traders, who followed in their wake, speedily established trading posts on the Aleutian Islands, and gradually crept down the coast.

At this period the most uncertain notions prevailed as to the nature of the connexion between America and Asia. To Captain Cook belongs the honour of having made known the true conformation of that distant shore and the relative proximity of the two continents. His journals, first published in 1784-5, captivated public attention by their accounts of the numbers of fur-bearing animals in the waters and along the coasts of the North Pacific Ocean, and the high prices paid for their skins in China. The excitement became contagious, and soon a host of rival traders—English, French, Portuguese, East Indian, and American—flocked to those northern seas.

In 1799 an association of Siberian merchants was granted a charter by the Emperor Paul, under the title of the 'Russian American Company.' To this association was given for twenty years the exclusive enjoyment of the north-west coast as far south as the 55th degree of north latitude, in virtue of alleged discovery by Russian navigators. These privileges were subsequently confirmed and extended by the Emperor Alexander, under whose protection the power and influence of the Russian American Company, to which had been entrusted the control and management of the country, rapidly increased.

This assumption of sovereignty on the part of Russia over that portion of the coast lying between the 55th and 60th degrees conflicted with prior claims of Great Britain and Spain to the same region. The Russians, however, continued to encroach, and, not content with