

which had a warlike character. But the British charters to their colonies show that those pretensions were disregarded at a very early date. There was no occasion for opposition or direct denial, with respect to the Pacific, until the attention of other nations was directed towards that remote country. This was neglected because all the commercial nations were, in their attempts to colonize, or to conquer, foreign and till then unexplored regions, attracted by countries far more accessible, and were exclusively engaged in pursuits much more important. The East Indies and the West India Islands offered a vast and lucrative field for commercial enterprise and territorial acquisition. With respect to the continent of America, France, England, and Holland most naturally planted their colonies on the nearest opposite shores of the Atlantic; and they did it in opposition to the pretended claim of Spain, which extended to the whole of America. Although strenuously engaged in extending those colonies westwardly, these, in the year 1754, twenty years only before Cook's third voyage, hardly extended beyond the Mississippi. What immediate interest could then have impelled either France or England to enter a formal protest against the antiquated claim of Spain to a country with which they had never attempted even to trade? And what opportunity had occurred for doing it prior to Cook's voyage?

But, what is still more conclusive, the country in question was equally neglected by Spain herself. Some exploring voyages, few of which are authentic, were indeed made by Spanish navigators; and the claims which may be derived from their discoveries have now been transferred to the United States, so far as discovery alone can give a claim, and no further. But, during more than two centuries that Spain had no competitor on the Pacific, there was on her part no occupancy, no settlement, or attempt to make a settlement. She had some missions on the western coast of the peninsula of California; but her missions or settlements in Northern or New California are of quite recent date; that of the most southern (San Diego) in 1769, and that of the most northern (San Francisco) in 1776, two years only before Cook's arrival at Nootka Sound.

In point of fact, the contested territory had been utterly neglected by Spain. All the energies, such as they were, of her Mexican colonies were much more advantageously applied to the improvement of the vast and rich countries which they had conquered, principally to the discovery and working of the richest and most productive mines of the precious metals as yet known.

Anson's expedition was purely military, and confined to southern latitudes. But the narrative drew the public attention towards the Pacific ocean, and gave a new impulse to the spirit of discovery. Almost immediately after the peace of 1763, voyages were undertaken for that purpose by the Governments of England and France; the Pacific was explored; the Russians on the other hand had, more than thirty years before, ascertained the continuity of the American continent from Behring's Straits to Mount St. Elias. It was then, and not till then, that Spain, or rather the Mexican Government, awakening from its long lethargy, extended its missions to New California. In the year 1774, Perez, with his pilot, Martinez, sailed as far north as the northern extremity of Queen Charlotte's Island, having anchored in Nootka Sound, and, as Martinez asserts, perceived the entrance to Fuca's Straits. New and important discoveries were made by Quadra and Heceta in the year 1775. The sequel is well known.

But on what foundation did the claim of Spain rest? If she had, indeed, an absolute right to the whole country bordering on the Pacific, derived either from natural or international law, or from usages generally recognised, it matters but little, as respects right, whether other nations had acquiesced in, or opposed, her claim. If there was no foundation for that absolute and exclusive right of sovereignty, Spain could transfer nothing more to the United States than the legitimate claims derived from her discoveries.