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plaining the issue in the interest of from our pre- n the spirit rnement, and ed unless the nderstood. d Ashburton eel in 1842

to proceed as British plenipotentiary to Washington, and settle various outstanding difficulties with the American Government, the dispute concerning the Maine boundary was one in which any government tenacious of its rights, and occupying our position, would have refused to yield. Our claim was not one through which we grasped at a neutral territory. The dispute, to describe it accurately, was one in which the American Government claimed territory that was ours by virtue of the spirit of the treaty, by virtue of the letter of the treaty, as that letter was understood by ourselves, and by a neutral arbiter, and also by actual occupation; for though Maine settlers had pushed their way far north, the country lying about the Madawaska River, one of the tributaries of the St. John, had long been in permanent occupation of a community, partly British, partly French Canadian, which viewed with extreme apprehension and displeasure the prospect of being transferred to the Government of the United States. The American claim was a manifest encroachment. The line of highlands they wished to make the boundary failed in all particulars to fulfil the description of the treaty. No Government, therefore, occupying the position in reference to this dispute in which the American Government stood, could have continued to assert its claims without being animated by a stronger determination to obtain the object of its desire than to effect a just settlement of the question at issue.

But the practical conclusion to which the British Government came on giving their instructions to Lord Ashburton evidently was, that it was not worth while to assert our rights at the cost of a war with the United States. The excitement in America was very great. The people of Maine openly declared that they would fight for the northern boundary if they did not obtain a favourable settlement. Public opinion in this country, where the question at stake was too intricate to be properly understood, would not have sanctioned a war with America for the sake of a boundary dispute on the frontiers of Canada. The consequence was that Lord Ashburton, finding the alternatives before him were war, or the surrender of our territorial rights, chose to make the surrender. He agreed to a compromise line not diverging very much from that suggested thirteen years previously by the King of the Netherlands. We are not by any means apologising for his diplomacy; and it is quite possible that by a little better management he might have secured somewhat more favourable terms, even while still avoid-

ing that rupture of our ostensibly amicable relations with America which the British Government was so anxious to avert. Lord Ashburton was an amateur diplomatist, whom Mr. Daniel Webster, the American Secretary of State, circumvented in many ways. The treaty which he concluded was an ignominious treaty, not inaccurately described in the political controversies of the time as a 'capitulation.' But it was defended by Sir Robert Peel, on the ground that a few hundred thousand, a few million acres of territory were of no consequence compared with securing the friendship of the United States. It may be open to discussion whether a great nation can ever give way before an unrighteous demand, and practically in deference to menace, without incurring some ultimate penalty; but without going into that question just now, we may here be content to take note of the broad facts that in the Maine boundary dispute the English claim was substantiated in the negotiations; that the Americans showed themselves resolved to precipitate hostilities if their claim was not conceded; and that to avoid going to war, the British Government yielded what it had clearly shown to be its just rights.

One episode connected with the Ashburton negotiations may be noticed here for the light it helps to throw on the principles of American diplomacy. Thirty years ago it was the subject of much excited controversy. We allude to the famous map scandal, the facts of which were as follows:—after the treaty negotiated by Lord Ashburton and Mr. Webster had been signed, and during the debate which took place in the American Senate prior to the ratification, Mr. Rives, a member of that body, arguing in favour of the ratification, made a very remarkable statement. He wanted the Senate not to reject the treaty on the ground that it did not give the American Government all it had claimed, because, if the Maine-boundary question went to another arbitration, it was possible that further researches in the archives of Europe might bring to light some embarrassing document likely to throw new doubts on the validity of the American claim. Indeed, he said such a document had already been discovered. Mr. Jared Sparks, a Boston historian, while pursuing historical researches in the archives of the Foreign Office at Paris, had discovered a letter from Benjamin Franklin—one of the American negotiators of the treaty of 1783—to the Count de Vergennes referring to a map on which he had marked the boundary just settled by the treaty, with 'a strong red line.' A map which corresponded to the references in the letter was also found by