

Nootka Sound, arriving there in the month of August. He traced the coast from thence as far as 53° north latitude, and carried on a lucrative trade with the natives, principally for sea-otter skins. The same year another vessel, commanded by Captain Peters, started from Macao on a similar enterprise; but it was never afterwards heard of, and is supposed to have been lost. In India, too, the spirit of speculation became similarly excited. Two coppered vessels were fitted out at Bombay, in 1786, under the direction of Mr. Strange, who was himself a principal owner. They proceeded in company from the Malabar coast to Batavia; passed through the Straits of Macassar, where one of the vessels ran upon a reef, and was obliged to haul ashore at Borneo for repairs. From thence they steered eastward of the Palao Islands, and arrived at Nootka at the end of June. From Nootka, where they left the Surgeon's Mate to learn the language, and to collect skins by the time of their intended return, they proceeded to explore the adjacent parts of the coast; but it does not appear that the expedition succeeded in advancing the fur-trade to any great extent.

Without noticing the proceedings of an expedition despatched from Bengal, and another from Ostend, we may briefly sketch the voyage of the *King George* and the *Queen Charlotte*, commanded by Captains Portlock and Dixon. These vessels were fitted out by a society of gentlemen in England, who obtained a privilege to trade to the north-west coast of America. These vessels sailed from England in the beginning of September, 1785, touched at the Falkland Islands, and the Sandwich Islands, and arrived at Cook's River, on the American coast, in the month of August. From thence, after collecting a few furs, they steered, at the end of September, to Prince William's Sound, intending to winter there; but they were forced by the weather to winter in some other place. The storms and bad weather accompanied them till they arrived off Nootka Sound; when they were so near the shore that a canoe came off to them; but though thus near accomplishing their purpose, a fresh storm came on, and obliged them finally to bear away to the Sandwich Islands, where they remained during the winter. On the following year they returned to the coast, and made numerous geographical discoveries. They discovered Queen Charlotte's Islands, at a part of the coast supposed to be not more than eight hundred miles distant from the westernmost station of the Hudson's Bay Company. The two ships remained in those parts till they had collected full cargoes of valuable furs, which they sold in China.

Such was the excitement produced by the profits accruing from the trade thus laid open, that by the year 1792, no fewer than twenty-one vessels, under different flags, were plying along the north-west coast of America, and trading with the natives. The traffic was a remarkable one; for almost the only kind of fur sought for was that of the sea-otter, and almost the only customers the Chinese, who gave such enormous prices as to attract all the dealers thither. The greater part of these trading ships were American, and owned by Boston merchants. They generally remained on the coast and about the adjacent seas for two years, carrying on as wandering and adventurous a commerce on the water, as did the traders and the "trappers" on land. Their trade extended along the whole coast, from California to the high northern latitudes. They would run in near shore, anchor, and wait for the natives to come off in their canoes with peltries, (undressed furs.) When the trade was exhausted at one place, they would weigh anchor and set off to another. In this way they would pass the summer; and when autumn came on they were accustomed to depart to the Sandwich Islands, and winter in some friendly and plentiful harbour. In the following year they would resume their summer trade, commencing at California and proceeding north; and, having in the course of two seasons collected a sufficient cargo of peltries, would make the best of their way to China.

The people, however, who entered most effectively and extensively into the fur-trade of the Pacific were the Russians. Considerable success having attended certain Russian voyages to the Aleutian Islands, and along the north-western shore of North America, in the middle of the last century, two Russian mercantile houses, of the names of Schelikoff and Galikoff, projected, in 1785, the formation of a regular company, to encourage the fur-trade in those regions, under the denomination of the "Russian-American Fur Company." Schelikoff himself, the head of one of the establishments, was the commander of all their early expe-

ditions. They erected forts for the protection of a chain of factories on most of the islands; and induced a number of respectable merchants to join in their extensive and lucrative adventures at the expense of the natives, from whom they did not fail to take every opportunity of wresting the staple produce of the district. Many cruelties became by degrees charged against them: and the Emperor Paul was upon the eve of suppressing the association altogether; when the company pledged itself, through its active agent M. von Resanoff, to adopt more regular proceedings. In 1799 it was formally established with considerable privileges, and incorporated with a capital of two hundred and sixty thousand pounds sterling. The sovereignty of that part of the American continent along the coast of which the posts had been established was claimed by the Russian Crown, on the plea that the land had been discovered and occupied by its subjects. As China was the grand mart for the furs collected in these quarters, the Russians had the advantage over their competitors in the trade. The latter had to take their peltries to Canton, which, however, was a mere receiving mart, from whence they had to be distributed over the interior of the empire and sent to the northern parts, where there was the chief consumption. The Russians, on the contrary, carried their furs by a shorter voyage directly to the northern parts of the Chinese Empire; thus being able to sell them to the Chinese at a cheaper price by saving the expense of carriage.

As we shall not, perhaps, have occasion again to refer to the Russian-American Fur Company, we may make a few more observations thereon in this part of our subject. The company obtained, successively, the patronage of the Emperors Alexander and Nicholas; and the state minister, Romanzoff, introduced many useful changes in its constitution. The condition of the fur-collectors of the company is said, however, to be still miserably wretched, and only to be exceeded by that of the oppressed natives, who are in turn their slaves. The company's head-quarters are at Moscow; and the furs obtained are chiefly sold at three great fairs, viz., at Kiachta, in China, for the Chinese trade; at Nishnei Novogorod, between Moscow and Casan, for the Russian trade; and at Leipsic for the general European trade.

While Russia was thus consolidating and systemizing her fur-trading operations on the north-western coast of America, other parties were directing their attention to a portion of the coast further southward. As early as the year 1763, shortly after the cession of Canada to the English, Captain Jonathan Carver, who had been in the British provincial army, projected a journey across the continent, from the Canadian lakes to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. His objects were to ascertain the breadth of the continent at its broadest part, and to determine on some place on the shores of the Pacific, where government might establish a post to facilitate the discovery of a north-west passage: he also thought that a settlement on this extremity of America would disclose new sources of trade, promote many useful discoveries, and open a more direct communication with the English settlements in Asia. This enterprising man was twice baffled in individual efforts to accomplish this journey. On a third attempt he was joined by Richard Whitworth, who had wealth enough to engage a band of fifty or sixty hardy adventurers to accompany them. The Indians of the western regions of America had been often heard to speak of a great river, called by them the "Oregon," or the "river of the west," which flowed into the Pacific, and it was one part of Carver's plan to endeavour to reach this river. Unfortunately, however, the breaking out of the American revolution put an end to the scheme, just as he had obtained the sanction of the government; and he does not appear to have made another attempt.

Carver's want of success damped but did not extinguish the enterprise of others in the same quarter. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, one of the most energetic and talented of the "Nor-Westers," undertook a perilous journey across the continent to the Pacific, which he reached in 1793. He succeeded in tracing a river very nearly to its mouth at the Pacific, and thought this to be the Oregon; but it was afterwards found that the anxiously-sought river lay two hundred miles farther south. Mackenzie afterwards suggested the policy of opening an intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific, and forming regular establishments through the interior, and at both extremes, as well as along the coasts and islands. By this means, he argued, the entire command of the fur-trade of North America might be obtained from latitude 48° to the Pole,—excepting that portion held