

"By opening the intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and forming regular establishments through the interior, and at both extremes, the entire command of the fur trade of North America might be obtained, from latitude 38 degrees north to the pole. To this may be added the fishery in both seas, and the markets of the four quarters of the globe. Such would be the field for commercial enterprise, and incalculable would be the produce of it when supported by the operations of that credit and capital which Great Britain so eminently possesses." And this, the writer adds, is to be followed by the complete exclusion of Americans from the country.

And to all these advantages, is to be added the obvious fact, developed by the facilities of steam communication, which now reckons contiguity by time in transition, and not by distance, that Oregon may be brought nearer to the heart of this Union, than was Louisiana when annexed by Mr. Jefferson. And through this medium may be opened a great thoroughfare to China and the commerce of the East.

Such is the value of this possession. Such is the importance of the commercial question, whether England shall usurp, or we enjoy our own.

#### WHAT IS THE AMERICAN TITLE TO OREGON?

The claims of the United States to title are briefly these: In May, 1792, Captain Robert Gray, of Boston, in the ship *Columbia*, made the first discovery of the mouth of the great river of Oregon, which he named after his vessel. In 1804, Lewis and Clark, in an expedition recommended by Thomas Jefferson, explored this river from its source to the Pacific ocean, and took possession in behalf of the United States. In 1810, John Jacob Astor sent out a colony, and planted three establishments in the territory. This was the first settlement and actual occupancy by any civilized people.

In the war with Great Britain, these posts were taken possession of by Great Britain, and, by the treaty of Ghent, they were surrendered back to the United States unconditionally—Great Britain thus acknowledging the title to be in the United States.

The American title, therefore, is founded on priority of discovery, followed by actual occupation; on the virtual recognition by the British Government, of the title of the United States, in 1818, up to which time, and long after, we never heard of any claim to the territory on the part of Great Britain; on the subsequent acquisition by the United States of all the titles of Spain to the Northwest coast, by the Florida treaty in 1819, and the transferred titles and claims of France, through its extension of the Louisiana territory; and, lastly, upon the ground of *contiguity*, which, of itself, should give to the United States a stronger right to those territories, as unoccupied country, than could be advanced by any other power.

Great Britain founds her claim, first, on the commercial treaty with Spain in 1790, which has but a remote bearing on the question, and which was abrogated by war between the two nations, before Spain transferred her title to the United States; and, second, by pretended priority of discovery of the *Columbia* river. But the only evidence on which this rests is, the exploring of a portion of the Northwest coast by Lieutenant Meares, in 1788, who, so far from discovering or suspecting the existence of the great river of the West, gave to the cape and the Bay of *Columbia* the names of Cape Disappointment and Deception Bay; which attest his failure.

"It has been thus established, (says Mr. Gallatin, in his conference with the British Plenipotentiaries in 1827,) that the *Columbia* river was first discovered by the United States; that the first discovery was attended by a complete exploration of the river, before any such exploration had been made by any other nation; by a simultaneous actual occupation and possession, and by subsequent settlements made within a reasonable time, which have been interrupted only by the casualties of war. And this, it is contended, gives to the United States, according to the acknowledged law and usages of nations, a right to the whole country drained by that river and its tributary streams. And these, strengthened by the transfer of the Spanish and French claims, establish, it is firmly believed, a stronger title to the country than has ever, at any former time, been asserted by any nation to vacant territory."—*20th Congress, 1st sess. Doc. No. 199, House of Reps.*

The validity of the American title, thus established, has never been doubted or questioned by any American President, Minister, Congress, or Committee, except that it was tampered with by Mr. Clay, who, when Secretary of State, in 1826, offered to yield to Great Britain one-third of our rights. It was affirmed by Jefferson, in 1804, and has been insisted on by every President since. Even when Mr. Adams as President, and Mr. Clay as Secretary, in 1826, proposed to yield a portion of our claim by a compromise—to adopt the 49th degree of latitude as the boundary, which would have surrendered about one-third of the American claim—the claims of Great Britain, then first formally presented, were regarded as new and extraordinary; nor did they "raise any doubts in the mind of the President, of the strength and solidity of our title."—*Mr. Clay to Mr. Gallatin, February 24, 1827.*

All the reports of Committees of Congress, from 1822 till now, have maintained the validity

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