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The rights of Spain were really non-existent, except in the imagination of American diplomatists. Sir Francis Drake was the earliest navigator on the coast in dispute. In 1579 he discovered the land in lat. 48°, coasted down to about 38°, and went through the form of taking possession of the country in the name of his sovereign. For a long time the region was called by the name he gave it, New Albion. No very early Spanish navigator went so far north as Drake, and vague as the British claims on New Albion may have been in the last century, they were undoubtedly acknowledged to exist. In 1774 a Spanish naval expedition from Mexico touched at San Diego, in California, and then stood out at sea, giving a wide berth to all country that could possibly be considered New Albion, afterwards touching the land again well to the north of Drake's discoveries in lat. 53° 50'. In 1775 another Spanish expedition, under a Dr. Heceta, sailing along the coast, observed, about lat. 46°, a great bay, the head of which could not be seen, but which Heceta believed, from the evidence of its currents and eddies, to be the mouth of some great river or passage to another sea. This bay must have been the mouth of the Columbia River, and the United States diplomatists, to lose no advantage open to them, grounded one of their claims to the valley of the Columbia River, settled though it was by British subjects, on the theory that Heceta had discovered the mouth of the stream, that Spain had thus obtained territorial rights over the country it watered, and that these rights had been ceded to the United States by the treaty of Florida. The exquisite beauty of this claim is still further enhanced by the fact that the treaty of Florida itself was never ratified by Spain, which Power distinctly rejected the convention. It was taken as ratified by the United States, in spite of this little informality, and eventually it received such legal sanction as was possible under the circumstances from the revolted republic of Mexico.

Spain never promulgated Heceta's discoveries as the basis of any territorial claim, apparently respecting the British rights to New Albion. But England was animated by no jealous policy in reference to the Pacific coasts of America, and when a difficulty arose in 1789, between British and Spanish subjects in Nootka Sound, the British Government merely exacted a convention acknowledging that the coast north of the existing Spanish settlements was free and open for the purposes of colonisation to the subjects of both countries. It might have been

supposed that this Nootka Sound convention would have laid at rest for ever all idea of exclusive Spanish sovereignty north of San Francisco, and even American writers find it, like Franklin's map in the Maine controversy, 'an embarrassing document.' But they endeavour to get over it in this way.* Wars between States cancel their mutual treaties. Great Britain was at war with Spain in 1796, therefore the validity of the Nootka Sound convention expired. It is triumphantly pointed out that it was not renewed by the treaty of Madrid. It happens, however, that the Nootka Sound treaty was one of a class of treaties explicitly revived in 1815, but independently of all such technical points, its importance in the Oregon controversy consists in this,—that it was an acknowledgment of a state of facts, not a treaty calling any new relations between the parties signing it into existence.

What has been called the French claim to Oregon, obtained by the Americans through the purchase of Louisiana, is almost too extravagant to be worth examination. Louisiana never thought of claiming, nor did France or Spain ever claim for her 'the slightest colour of right to any portion of the western side of the North American continent.'† The claims of the United States, by settlement and discovery, are a little more complicated, but they will be found on examination to break down no less thoroughly.

Vancouver, the most industrious explorer of the coasts in the neighbourhood of the island that bears his name, landed, in 1792, on the shores of the great bay called Admiralty Inlet, and took formal possession of the country in the name of the King of England, reviving the name New Albion. Accounts of this proceeding were published without exciting any comment either from Spain or the United States, in 1801. Meanwhile, in the same year, an American, Captain Gray, of Boston, in a vessel called the 'Columbia,' discovered the river now known by that name. It is alleged that he proceeded up the stream first ten miles, when he took in fresh water, and then fifteen miles further, when he found he had taken a wrong channel and had to return. There are some odd circumstances connected with Captain Gray's adventures. That there was such a person is certainly vouched for by Vancouver, who did receive from him information of the existence of the river. But all the details of the discovery rest on the authority of an

* Greenhow.

† 'Quarterly Review,' March, 1846.