

main pursuit, as it became their standard of value. In a manner precisely similar, the northern part of Asia was overrun by traders moving in an easterly direction. The Russian expeditions of conquest followed in the wake of the Russian fur-traders, and about the beginning of the last century, the Russians began to establish themselves on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

For the Siberian merchants, the chief quest was that of the sable, and thus it is that the occupation of Siberia has been described as one gigantic sable hunt, beginning at the Ural Mountains and extending to the Eastern Ocean. This ocean—the Pacific—was reached by the valley of the Anadyr River, far to the north, and at Okotsk, on the sea of the same name. Between these places lay the remarkable volcanic peninsular of Kamtschatka. About 1696 its conquest began, and in some fifteen years it had been throughout rendered tributary to Russia; but the great ocean to the eastward, and what it might contain, still remained unknown.

The enormous extension which the Russian Empire had achieved in Asia, naturally attracted the special attention of its ruler, and in the last year of her reign, Peter the Great planned an expedition of explorations from the eastern Asiatic coast toward America. Before the expedition could be despatched the Czar died, but his consort, the Empress Catherine, anxious in all respects to carry out the wishes of her late husband, caused the preparations to be continued, and in 1725 Vitus Behring was despatched on this mission, in conformity with the original intention of the Emperor. Behring was a Dane, engaged in the Russian service. He left St. Petersburg provided with a corps of assistants and all the facilities which the government could furnish, to cross Siberia to Okotsk, which was to be his port of departure for the exploration of the unknown North Pacific.

It is unnecessary to follow his various journeys and the many delays which he experienced, nor is it relevant to the present subject to trace his first expedition from Okotsk by sea, in which he outlined the northern part of Asia toward Behring Straits. His celebrated voyage to the American continent, with which we are chiefly concerned, was not executed till the year 1741, when he left the Bay of Avacha, in