

comparatively little importance being attached by England or Russia to the delimitation of their respective jurisdictions on land. The whole negotiations which led to the treaty of 1825 grew out of an attempt on the part of Russia to circumscribe the sea:—

‘So entirely and absolutely true is this proposition,’ writes Mr. Canning, who as Foreign Minister had charge of the negotiations, ‘that the settlement of the limits of the respective possessions of Great Britain and Russia on the north-west coast of America was proposed by us only as a mode of facilitating the adjustment of the difference arising from the ukase by enabling the Court of Russia, under cover of the more comprehensive arrangement, to withdraw, with less appearance of concession, the offensive pretensions of that edict.

‘It is comparatively indifferent to us whether we hasten or postpone all questions respecting the limits of territorial possession on the continent of America, but the pretensions of the Russian ukase of 1821 to exclusive dominion over the Pacific could not continue longer unrepealed without compelling us to take some measure of public and effectual remonstrance against it.’

This indifference to the ascertainment and settlement of the boundaries between the British and Russian possessions accounts for the fact that no survey of the north-west coast of America was undertaken for nearly a century after its original exploration by Vancouver, during the whole of which period that discoverer’s charts remained the standard and indeed the only original authority.

Such was the state of affairs regarding Alaska when, in March 1867, it was announced that Russia had ceded her North American possessions to the United States. The negotiations were conducted with the utmost secrecy, and nothing was known of the transaction in America until the issue of the President’s proclamation summoning an extra session of the Senate to consider it. The motives for the sale were subsequently declared to be the small value and unproductive nature of the territory, the cost of its protection and maintenance, and the desire of Russia to be rid of a possession which at some future time might involve her in difficulties with the United States. To these reasons her Majesty’s Minister of the day at Washington opined should be added a secret hope of possible complications between England and the United States which the extension of the latter’s jurisdiction to the north of British America might entail. This was afterwards openly stated by Charles Sumner, who, in his speech in Congress on the cession, suggested that in parting with Alaska Russia was moved by considerations