

"Notwithstanding the prolix discussion which the subject has already undergone, the Undersigned, &c., feels obliged to place on record a few observations in reply to the statement marked J. B., which he had the honour to receive on the 16th of this month from the hands of the Secretary of State of the United States, terminating with a proposition on the part of the United States for the settlement of the Oregon question."

Historical Note.

1845

Mr. Pakenham ended this paper as follows:—

"After this exposition of the views entertained by the British Government, respecting the relative value and importance of the British and American claims, the American Plenipotentiary will not be surprised to hear that the Undersigned does not feel at liberty to accept the proposal offered by the American Plenipotentiary for the settlement of the question.

"This proposal, in fact, offers less than that tendered by the American Plenipotentiaries in the Negotiation of 1826, and declined by the British Government.

"On that occasion it was proposed that the navigation of the Columbia should be made free to both parties. On this point nothing is said in the proposal to which the Undersigned has now the honour to reply. While with respect to the proposed freedom of the ports on Vancouver's Island, south of latitude 49°, the facts which have been appealed to in this paper, as giving to Great Britain the strongest claim to the possession of the whole island, would seem to deprive such proposal of any value.

"The Undersigned therefore trusts that the American Plenipotentiary will be prepared to offer some further proposal for the settlement of the Oregon question more consistent with fairness and equity, and with the reasonable expectations of the British Government, as defined in the statement marked D, which the Undersigned had the honour to present to the American Plenipotentiary at the early part of the present negotiation.

"The Undersigned, &c."

Mr. Pakenham had thus declined to accept the proposal of the United States' Government. Mr. Buchanan thereupon delivered another paper, dated 30th August, in which, after further arguments, he withdrew that proposal. The concluding passages of this paper were as follows:—

"Upon the whole, from the most careful and ample examination which the Undersigned has been able to bestow upon the subject, he is satisfied that the Spanish-American title now held by the United States, embracing the whole territory between the parallels of 42° and 51° 40', is the best in existence to this entire region, and that the claim of Great Britain to any portion of it has no sufficient foundation.

"Notwithstanding that such was, and still is, the opinion of the President, yet, in the spirit of compromise and concession, and in deference to the action of his predecessors, the Undersigned, in obedience to his instructions, proposed to the British Plenipotentiary to settle the controversy by dividing the territory in dispute by the 49th parallel of latitude, offering, at the same time, to make free to Great Britain any port or ports on Vancouver's Island, south of this latitude, which the British Government might desire. The British Plenipotentiary has correctly suggested that the free navigation of the Columbia River was not embraced in this proposal to Great Britain, but, on the other hand, the use of free ports on the southern extremity of this island had not been included in former offers.

"Such a proposition as that which has been made, never would have been authorized by the President, had this been a new question.

"Upon his accession to office he found the present negotiation pending. It had been instituted in the spirit and upon the principle of compromise. Its object was, as avowed by the negotiators, not to demand the whole territory in dispute for either country; but, in the language of the first Protocol 'to treat of the respective claims of the two countries to the Oregon Territory, with the view to establish a permanent boundary between them, westward of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.'

"Placed in this position, and considering that Presidents Monroe and Adams had, on former occasions, offered to divide the territory in dispute by extending the 49th parallel of latitude to the Pacific Ocean, he felt it to be his duty not abruptly to arrest the negotiation, but so far to yield his own opinion as once more to make a similar offer.

"Not only respect for the conduct of his predecessors, but a sincere and anxious desire to promote peace and harmony between the two countries influenced him to pursue this course. The Oregon question presents the only cloud which intercepts the prospect of a long career of mutual friendship and beneficial commerce between the two nations, and this cloud he desired to remove.