

(Continued.)  
 HISTORICAL ADVENTURES ON THE  
 PACIFIC COAST.  
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 THE SEARCH FOR THE PASSAGE TO INDIA,  
 SOME INTERLOPERS.  
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 BY MRS. F. F. VICTOR.

The desire to find a shorter route to India through the South seas, as the Pacific continued to be called, had not abated in Europe since the beginning of the 16th century. English and Dutch navigators were searching for it on the eastern side of the continent, and Spanish navigators, as we have seen, on the western side. There was a fiction current, started by one Gaspar Cortereal, that there existed a strait beginning on the coast of Labrador, through which he had sailed into the Pacific, and which he called the *Strait of Anian*; nor were those lacking who still, in the latter part of the century, insisted that they knew such a strait to exist, and that it opened into the Pacific in latitude about 50°. As the Spanish had explored the coast almost as far north as that, the opinion prevailed that they might have overlooked it, or at least might not quite have reached it; but never that it did not exist. Many, indeed, were the "sailors' yarns" people were called upon to believe in those days of pure adventure, when knowledge had so little to do with the discovery of the New World. Some of them furnish very curious reading at the present time, especially one which refers to an expedition from Callao, in Peru, in 1640, to the North Pacific, with the purpose of intercepting vessels from "Boston in New England," which were searching for a northwest passage. The New England naval service could not have been reckoned as very formidable so soon after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.

But to return to a period somewhat earlier: The government of Mexico had noticed with alarm the efforts made by other nations to discover the passage to India, and was also informed of the rumored Straits of Anian. Therefore, when Juan de Fuca, after the capture of the *galleon*, had at length arrived in Mexico, he was employed by the Viceroy to command an expedition for the discovery of that strait, and instructed to fortify the entrance when found, in order to prevent other nations, especially the English, from passing through it. The first expedition, made about 1590, resulted in nothing of importance; but in 1592 he repeated his attempt and discovered, as he believed, the veritable passage to India, in latitude 38½°—otherwise the strait that bears his adopted name, with a "San" before it, after the Spanish manner of "sainting" everything. These are his own words concerning the discovery: "Being entered thus far into the said strait, and being come into the North Sea already, and finding the sea wide enough everywhere, and to be about thirty or forty leagues wide at the mouth of the strait, where I entered, I thought I had well discharged my office; and that not being armed to resist the force of the savage people that might happen, I therefore set sail and returned to Acapulco."

The Greek navigator had indeed "well discharged his office." Looking at the discovery to-day, with modern and Oregonian eyes, and in connection with trans-continental railroads, Fuca was not wrong in his presumption. The purposes of God and nature, as displayed in the existence of Puget Sound and the Strait of Fuca, backed, as they are, by the most wonderful mineral, agricultural and commercial resources, are not to be doubted.

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Fuca met the usual reward of discoverers—neglect. Not only did the Viceroy fail to reward him, but he was equally unappreciated by the English, to whom, in resentment, he offered his services. Strangely indifferent, too, the Viceroy appeared—for he made no attempt to survey or fortify the strait so long sought, and as he had reason to believe, at last found. Perhaps he feared to invite attention to its existence. In the meantime Philip II., changing the national policy somewhat, was desirous of colonizing his American possessions; but he made the mistake of supposing that when he sent a colony to Rio Grande del Norte he was actually settling California! In spite of latitude and longitude, the width and extent of the continent were quite beyond the comprehension of the Spanish scientific mind.

At the very close of the 16th century active operations were resumed by Mexico, with the object of surveying and planting colonies along the coast of the Pacific; and in these expeditions, of which Viscanio was leader, settlements were made at various points along the coast of California, as far north as Monterey. When this had been done, Viscanio continued his voyage to the north, and meeting with strong gales, took refuge in a bay in latitude about 38°, which he named San Francisco; though, probably, not the same bay entered by Drake, and called San Francisco by moderns. Viscanio was searching for traces of the wreck of one of the Manilla *galleons*, which was supposed to be in this vicinity, but he found nothing of her. He continued his voyage again, until the cold, strong winds in latitude 42°, compelled him to put about, as his men were nearly all down with scurvy. He named a high, white bluff, *Cape San Sebastian*—the point of his return. It was not far enough north for Cape Blanco, and was probably snow-covered when he saw it. But whether it was Point St. George, near Crescent City, or one of the promontories further north, it is certain that Viscanio saw the Oregon coast in 1603. His pilot, Flores, whose vessel had been separated from him by the gale, and was driven before it to the shelter of Cape Mendocino, had been in a more northern latitude. The account he gave of his voyage is recorded as follows: "On the 10th of January, the pilot, Antonio Flores, found that they were in the latitude of 43°, where the land formed a cape or point, called by him *Cape Blanco*. From that point the land began to turn to the northwest, and near it was discovered a rapid and abundant river, with ash-trees, willows, brambles, and other trees of Castile on its banks, which they endeavored to enter, but could not, from the force of the current. Ensign Martin de Aguilar, commander, and Antonio Flores, the pilot, seeing that they had already reached a higher latitude than had been ordered by the Viceroy, in his instructions, that the *capitana* did not appear, and that the number of the sick was very great, agreed to return to Acapulco. It is supposed this river is the one leading to a great city, which was discovered by the Dutch when they were driven thither by storms, and that it is the Strait of Anian, through which the ship passed in sailing from the North Sea to the South Sea; and that the city called Quivera is in these parts; and that this is the region referred to in the account which His Majesty read, and which induced him to order this expedition."

This is the language of the historian Torquemada, and is interesting as showing the object of the expedition to have been, so far as Philip III. was con-

cerned, the finding of one or more of those fabulous cities spoken of in the wild fictions before referred to, which were so much in fashion. Certainly, if Aguilar and Flores were near enough to recognize ash and willow trees on the banks of the Coquille or the Umpqua, they may reasonably claim to have "discovered" the southern coast of Oregon. The winter rains had swollen these streams and accelerated their current, so it was no wonder the little *fragata* could not enter. It was well for her that she did not, or she might never have been heard of more, such were the hospitalities of the Indians of that region.

The fame of this new "Strait of Anian" spread abroad, and was for some time credited as being it. As late as 1620 the captain of a Manilla vessel, pretending to examine it, declared his belief that it was the mouth of a channel connecting with the Gulf of California—which theory would make California an island; and so it was represented on the Spanish maps. The hardships of this expedition of Viscanio's "were" such that both Aguilar and Flores died on the homeward voyage, as well as many of the crews of both vessels. Viscanio, himself, arrived home in safety, having sailed near enough to the California coast to see the verdure upon the hills, and to notice the smoke from numerous fires, from which he drew the inference that it was a well-inhabited country. The charts that he prepared of his surveys were lost or destroyed, and thus was rendered almost useless the labor and expenditure of the expedition. He died while preparing for another visit to the Oregon coast, after for a long time soliciting the commission from his procrastinating sovereign.

This was the last effort made by the Spanish government to extend its discoveries, for a period of a hundred and sixty years. During all that time she was losing rank as a maritime power, or as a power of any kind, and had to look more to retaining what was already hers, than to acquiring any new territory. Her commerce was the spoil of several of the navies of Europe, and she was almost continually engaged at war with one or more of her enemies. Buccaneering was the name given to that species of piracy which, during the whole of the 17th century, spoiled the commerce of Spain; and buccaneering was the favorite enterprise of the English, Dutch and French navigators. The Dutch, indeed, ventured into the Pacific, around the southern end of the continent, which they named Cape Horn, and carried off pearls from the Gulf of California, to the great chagrin of the Spanish authorities.

Fearing to make these articles on the earliest history of the Pacific Coast too long for the patience of newspaper readers, I shall here pass over the interesting period of the settlement of the Jesuits in Mexico and California, and the founding of the numerous missions as far north as Santa Clara, merely remarking that the Spanish government, despairing of reducing the country to any degree of civilization by means of military settlements, at last accepted the offers of the Jesuits to undertake the Christianizing of the Indians; and when that work was accomplished as far as possible, coolly ordered these missionaries out of the country—after its immemorial policy of rewarding its best servants with scorn and contumely. The Franciscans followed them, establishing all those missions north of the California peninsula, and remained undisturbed until the independence of Mexico, in our century.

In the meantime another interloper, and foe to the exclusive rights of Spain,

appeared upon the Pacific, by the way of Behring's Straits—and this was Peter the Great. After subjugating Northern Asia, he turned his attention to discovery in the North Seas, and to settling the question whether Asia and America were connected by an isthmus, or separated by a strait. He died, however, before the truth became known, and the inquiry was prosecuted by his widow, Catharine, with a good deal of vigor. In 1728 an expedition from the Kamtschatka river, sailing along the coast of Asia, northward, came into latitude 67 deg. 18 min.; or, into those straits that now bear the name of their Russian discoverer, though it was not for some time that he was aware that he had passed so close to the American coast, for which he was looking. He made two other attempts to find the coast of America, in the latter of which he succeeded. In July, 1741, he descried the coast in latitude 60°, having first sighted the snow-covered peak which he named Mount St. Elias. After this, he cruised about until he discovered the peninsula of Alaska, for which our government so recently paid Russia a handsome price.

But Behring paid his life for the discovery, as did very many of his crew. As winter approached, and storms set in, the *St. Peter*, Behring's vessel, was tossed and buffeted about for two months, during which time the crew never rested. In November they fell in with land—a small, rocky island—and determined to pass the winter ashore at all hazards. They were able to land the ship's stores, and to build some huts out of the ship's sails and spars, the ship going to pieces soon after. Out of the fragments that came ashore, they built themselves more comfortable shelter; but still, comfortless in that latitude. Behring expired on the 5th of December, and thirty of his crew soon followed him, and were buried on this rocky isle, which bears the name of its unfortunate discoverer, and lies in latitude 54 deg. 40 min.—the old boundary between Russia and Oregon!

Little do readers of history reflect upon the sacrifices made by all those who first undertake to battle with the wildness of nature. Surgeon Steller, of Behring's expedition, writing of those months of storm, says: "The general distress and mortality increased so fast, that not only the sick died, but those who pretended to be healthy, when relieved from their posts, fainted and fell down dead; of which the scantiness of the water, the want of biscuits and brandy, cold, wet, nakedness, vermin, and terror, were not the least causes." Causes enough, one should say, why men should faint and fall down dead, when relieved from watch or duty. It is some comfort to know that what were left of the crew of the *St. Peter* succeeded in constructing a craft out of the ship's remains, in which they sailed safe home in the following summer.

The object of the Russians in prosecuting their discoveries was the fur trade, which they made profitable in those northern regions. Later, they established a post on the coast of California, north of San Francisco Bay, in what is still called the Russian river country, but no serious effort was made to interfere with the Spanish title.

A Puget Sound paper says: Three car loads of ship knees were carried to Kalama on the train Wednesday, for Portland. These knees are an excellent example of Puget Sound production, and are simply samples of what may be got here within the limits of every town on the Sound. Men who claim to have nothing to do can go out into the forest and dig up valuable knees at any time of the year.