

HISTORICAL ADVENTURES ON THE PACIFIC COAST.*

A CONSIDERABLE FLUKEY AT NOOTKA.

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When the account of Cook's expedition was published, much excitement was occasioned thereby. Even before the appearance of the journal, the value of the fur trade that might be established between America and China was pretty well understood, and several nations stood ready to profit by it. The Russians, being already established on the Northwest coast, were the first to enter the trade. Then followed private expeditions from various parts of Europe, none of which were successful until 1785. Whatever the profits of the business, it was one that could not be carried on without literally "sailing under false colors."

For, be it remembered, the Partition of the Ocean was still nominally in force, so far as the Catholic powers were concerned. It is true that the other nations of Europe no longer respected the exclusive right of Spain to the navigation of the Pacific; Spain having to content herself if her undisputed sovereignty over the territories she claimed therein was respected. But there was another obstacle to the free navigation of the Pacific;—one that England, always fond of bestowing almost sovereign power upon mercantile corporations, had herself placed in the way of her own people. By act of Parliament, the trade of the Pacific had been divided between two commercial companies, known as the East India Company and the South Sea Company. Under the then existing regulations, and peculiar privileges of these companies, no British subject, except those in service or licensed by the South Sea Company, could make expeditions for trade or fishing to the West coast of America, or to the seas or islands within three hundred leagues of it, proceeding by the way of Cape Horn or the Straits of Magellan.

By the same authority, no British subjects, not licensed or employed by the East India Co., could proceed by the way of Cape of Good Hope to any seas or lands east of this line of division for purposes of trade or fishery. All British vessels violating these regulations were liable to confiscation, and their officers to heavy penalties. By this arrangement the East India Company was prevented from engaging in the fur trade, because its ships could not approach the American coast; and by the same law the South Sea Company could not engage in it because its vessels could not approach the China coast where the principal market was found.

In this exigency the East India Company did not hesitate to take the risk of infringing the rights of the South Sea Company; and more than once the flag of the former was seen floating over the seas belonging to the latter. But it was the more usual practice for British traders to procure license from the Portuguese authorities at Macao, and to evade the restrictions of both companies by taking refuge under papal authority, and sailing under Portuguese colors. Some of the vessels that were earliest engaged in this trade are enumerated in the preceding chapter.

By means of this coasting trade, much information concerning the countries on the western side of the continent was obtained, and very complete surveys of its shores were necessarily, if incidentally made. The most southern port of the fur traders was Nootka Sound, as it also seems to have been a favorite one, on account of its milder climate, and the facilities afforded for

ship-building. The next principal places of resort were Norfolk Sound, Port Gaudalupe, Prince William's Sound and Cook's River. Many were the curious incidents and adventures encountered by the first traders who met with more or less opposition from the nations; and very interesting are their observations on the habits and characters of the aboriginal peoples with whom they came in contact, before civilization had modified either.

Meanwhile, in 1785, a means had been found by which the obstacles to trade before mentioned, might be overcome. This was the founding of a company under the style and title of "King George's Sound Company," deriving its powers from both the other companies, and whose object was to monopolize the trade of the North Pacific coast and China. It was not until these arrangements were perfected that the British flag appeared in the waters in connection with commerce, or that an open attempt was made to lay claim to any part of the Spanish territory in the Pacific. Out of such an attempt grew one of the most romantic passages in the early history of the Northwest.

Spain had not been blind to the movement set on foot to secure the trade of the North Pacific; but she had been powerless to prevent it, and almost equally powerless to contest it by remaining as a commercial power upon the seas she laid claim to. One unsuccessful attempt was made to secure to herself the benefit of the commerce with China, and abandoned. It was not until 1788 that steps were taken to inquire into the operations of foreign vessels in the Pacific; but in March of that year the Viceroy of Mexico having received orders from the home government began to take active measures for the protection of Spain's interests in the Pacific.

Two vessels were dispatched from San Blas, on a voyage of inquiry—the *Princesa*, commanded by Estevan Martinez, and the *San Carlos*, commanded by Lieutenant Gonzalo Haro.

The vessels reached Prince William's Sound without encountering unusual delay, where they separated and explored the coast in opposite directions for some time, when again meeting, they proceeded to Unalaska, the largest of the Aleutian Islands, where they remained the guests of the Russians from the 30th of August to the 18th of September. From the Russians they learned that there were eight establishments belonging to them, all east of Prince William's Sound, where another one was then being erected. Martinez also learned that they had sent two vessels a few months before, to found a settlement at Nootka Sound; and that two large ships were building at Ochotsk for the prosecution of the fur trade. After this conference, however, the Russians confined their operations to the coast north of 54 deg. 40 min., except in the case of their settlement on the California coast, which they maintained while the fur trade continued to be remunerative.

Meanwhile an American vessel was about to enter into the combination of commercial and political elements drawing together about Nootka, as the center of the North Pacific fur trade; and was destined to figure in a very considerable drama about to be enacted there. This was the ship *Columbia*, from Boston, John Kendrick, master. She belonged to a company of Boston merchants, and had a consort, the sloop *Washington*, Robert Gray, master. The two vessels becoming separated in doubling Cape Horn, and the *Columbia*, being rather the worse for rough

weather, the latter vessel put into port on the island of Juan Fernandez, for repairs in May, 1788, at the very time when the Spanish Government was pursuing a course which was to drive intruders from the Pacific seas. The presence of an American vessel in a Spanish port was nothing especially new or alarming; inasmuch as they had for several years been in the habit of sailing quietly along the California coast, bringing cargoes of goods suited to the Indians and half-breeds of that country, which they exchanged for cargoes of hides and tallow, which the immense herds of California made cheap and plenty; and without exciting any unfriendly comment.

The *Columbia* had on this occasion a cargo of Indian goods, and was bound for the fur country. Whether or not the commandant at Juan Fernandez knew that does not appear; but at all events he treated Capt. Kendrick with great kindness and sent him on his way in comfortable repair. But in some way the Viceroy of Peru learned the destination of the Boston vessel, and communicated the same to the Viceroy of Mexico, Don Manuel de Floris; besides dismissing from office the good-natured but unlucky commandant, and dispatching a ship from Callao to intercept the *Columbia*. Whatever adventures befel the pursuing ship, the Boston trader saw nothing of her, and arrived in good time, as did also the sloop *Washington*, both getting in before the 20th Sept., 1788.

But reports had reached the Spanish Government in Mexico, and in the spring of the following year Flores fitted and dispatched on a second voyage the *Princesa* and *San Carlos*, Martinez and Haro commanders, with orders to proceed to Nootka and establish a fort. Their instructions were to receive with the attention and civility required by peace and friendship any Russian or English vessel that might appear at Nootka, but at the same time to declare the paramount rights of his Catholic majesty to the place, and the adjacent coasts, firmly but discreetly, and without using harsh or insulting language.

On the 6th of May the corvette *Princesa*, well manned and effectively equipped, entered the harbor of Nootka to take possession of the country and erect a fort. Her commander, Martinez, found no settlement or establishment there; only several vessels belonging to English and American traders.

There is, perhaps, no part of the Northwest coast more charmingly picturesque than the shores of Vancouver's Island. Innumerable harbors, coves, and islands indent its margin. Its shores are moderately high, and covered with evergreen trees, with little patches of rich green sward between them. The rocks that crop out of the banks are clothed with mosses and lichens of the most vivid tints, while the calm blue surface of the water in these coves reflects the whole lovely panorama like a picture.

Into such a quiet and beautiful harbor Martinez brought his vessel on that May day, 1789. He was alone, the *San Carlos* having fallen behind. He found lying at Nootka the ship *Iphigenia*, William Douglas, master, trading from Nootka to Macao; and the *Columbia*, in charge of Capt. Robert Gray—Kendrick having gone on a voyage up the coast with the *Washington*—trading, as she hoped, from the same port to the same port. These vessels received the *Princesa* with the usual compliments of meeting; and Martinez proceeded at once to examine their papers, and to inquire their business in

Nootka Sound, which belonged, as he reminded them, to his Catholic majesty.

To this demand Capt. Gray replied by showing his papers, and explaining that after the hardships of a voyage around the Horn, they had put into Nootka to refit; which answer seemed entirely satisfactory to the Spanish commander. In the same manner the Portuguese Captain of the *Iphigenia*, Viana by name, and the supercargo Douglas, who was the real captain, represented that "being in distress, having but little provisions, and in great want of every necessary, such as cables, anchors, rigging, sails, etc.," they had put in to refit; and that they were in daily expectation of Captain Meares, from Macao, who would be able to furnish them, when they would depart."

With this explanation also Martinez expressed himself satisfied, though subsequent events showed that he was not. A brief account of the manner in which the South Sea and East India Companies evaded each other's restrictions by sailing under false colors has already been given; and Martinez, who found a Portuguese captain, and instructions in the Portuguese tongue, from a Portuguese agent in Macao, probably understood well enough the subterfuge. But as the *Iphigenia* was really in distress, and unfit to go to sea; and as the *San Carlos* had not yet arrived to support him in any action he might take, he let things take their course.

He commenced without delay to land his stores, material and artillery for the erection of a fort, while the officers of the several vessels, Spanish, English and American, visited and dined each other in the most friendly fashion. What was the bill of fare of these gentlemen, and whether the *Iphigenia* was able to offer anything better than salt horse to her guests, must forever remain unanswered. It is a matter of record that the American captains had helped Viana to some supplies, from which fact it may be inferred that there was enough to eat, such as it was. So friendly was the feeling cultivated, that Viana was enabled to induce the Spanish commander to furnish him a sufficient outfit to get his vessel ready for sea; and to accept bills on the Portuguese merchant who was owner at Macao in payment.

Business was proceeding briskly, at Nootka when on the 10th of May, the *San Carlos*, Captain Haro, arrived. On the same day the American officers came down from a point up the Sound named Mawhina, where the *Columbia* was lying, with the intention of paying a visit to the Spanish commanders, and everything appeared friendly and pleasant in the atmosphere of Nootka. The captain and supercargo of the *Iphigenia* were invited on board the *Princesa*; but, presto, change! No sooner were they where they were invited to be, than Martinez, without further ceremony exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, you are my prisoners! and your vessel is seized!"

"For what cause?" inquired Douglas.

"Your papers are bad," returned Martinez. "They instruct you to take all English, Spanish or Russian vessels, of a force inferior to yours, and to send or carry their crews to Macao, there to be tried for their lives as pirates."

"Your interpretation of the papers is bad," retorted Douglas. "I do not understand Portuguese, but I saw a copy of them in English, at Macao, which maintained if I should be attacked by any of those nations, to defend myself, and if I had the superiority, to send the captains and crews to Macao, to answer for the insult they had offered."

Martinez, however, did not think the

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