

HISTORICAL ADVENTURES ON THE PACIFIC COAST.*

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CAPTAIN GRAY'S DISCOVERY OF THE COLUMBIA.

The results of the collision between the Spanish and English officers at Nootka, make an important chapter of history, though long since forgotten by any but the educated statesman or the learned historian. First, there was a demand on the part of the English government for redress. This demand Spain resisted. Then there was the arming of two large fleets by England, and the reiterated demand for important concessions on the part of Spain. As the quarrel proceeded, the King of France equipped a fleet for the assistance of Spain, and thereby got himself into trouble at home; for the National Assembly, taking umbrage at the King's action, passed an act depriving the King of the right to make war without the concurrence of the legislative and executive branches of the government. A large marine force was however raised both by France and by Holland, allies of the contending parties; and finally, a conference was held between Great Britain and Spain, the result of which was a convention called the *Nootka Treaty*. This convention undertook to define the rights of both nations; but left affairs in so doubtful a shape as to cause the abandonment of Nootka by both parties at that time; and ultimately led to the renewal of hostilities at a period considerably later.

Hanging dreamily over a boat's side, and enjoying the quiet beauty of Nootka harbor to-day, it seems impossible to believe that less than a century ago the place had so much of a history. Nature, serene and silent, pays no heed to the stormy passions of men—the avarice of nations. They come and go; smilingly she crosses every footprint. Her skies, rocks, mountains nor seas ever betray the secret to later generations; while we, ignorant and happy, fancy we tread on virgin earth or sail on unknown seas.

But we are not quite done with the history of Nootka, because it so happened that the American claim to the discovery of the Columbia river had to be sustained by the testimony of the Spanish officers at that place, when it became a matter of dispute between the United States and Great Britain. We have already spoken of the voyage made by Capt. Gray through the Strait of Fuca, and made mention of the fact that Kendrick and Gray exchanged vessels when they met at the mouth of the Strait, Gray going in the *Columbia* to Canton, and Kendrick remaining to explore the Gulf of Georgia in the Sloop *Washington*.

Capt. Kendrick's discoveries would never have been made known, as he was accidentally killed at the Sandwich Islands, had it not been that Mr. Meares, on returning to London, after the occurrences, above related, at Nootka, was possessed with the ambition to be thought a discoverer of no small merit, and a theorist of great acumen. He started the proposition that this part of the American continent was an immense archipelago, and to substantiate his views gave a highly imaginative account of the voyage of Kendrick, made after parting with Gray, and before he sailed for China and the Islands. The following is a quotation from his "*Observations on the Probable Existence of a Northwest Passage*."

"The *Washington* entered the Straits of Juan De Fuca, the knowledge of which she received from us, and penetrating up them, entered into an extensive sea, where she steered to the northward, and had communication with the

various tribes who inhabit the shores of the numerous islands that are situated at the back of Nootka Sound, and speak, with some little variation, the language of the Nootka people. The track of the vessel is marked on the map (Meares' chart) and is of great moment, (as it is now completely ascertained that Nootka Sound and the parts adjacent are islands, and comprehended within the great northern archipelago.) The sea also, which is seen to the east, is of great extent; and it is from this stationary point, and the most westerly points of Hudson's Bay, that we are to form an estimate of the distance between them." He goes on to state that the *Washington* sailed "through a sea extending upwards of eight degrees of latitude," and came out at the northward—all of which was written in support of a thought that the whole of northwest America was a collection of islands.

That an American vessel had passed through the Gulf of Georgia, and came out at the northern end of Vancouver's Island, would never have been heard of, had not Meares' account of this sea, and his theory of islands been attacked with ridicule by other captains who had been on the American coast. Compelled to give his authority, he explained that he got the story from a gentleman of irreproachable character who had met with Captain Kendrick in Canton from whom he got the particulars of the voyage, with the track of the vessel. This explanation proves that Gray and Kendrick, two American navigators, were the first to explore the Strait of Fuca since the old Greek pilot who gave it his name, and that they discovered the Gulf of Georgia.

As Nootka continued to be, up to, and after the discovery of the Columbia river, the rendezvous of vessels of all nations, it becomes necessary to bear this fact in mind, and also to observe the bearing of the Spanish and English officers, who, before the *Nootka Treaty* was formed, continued to meet there.

Before Martinez was removed from the post of commandante, in 1789, he seized an American vessel, called the *Fair American*, commanded by a lad of eighteen, named Metcalf. This act seems, however, to have been a mere pretence of keeping to general instructions, for the *Fair American* was immediately liberated; while her consort *Elenora* commanded by Captain Metcalf, senior, was not molested. There seems to have been the best feeling existing between the Spanish and American officers all through the Nootkan trouble; and in fact, their testimony in each other's behalf, as against the English, was afterwards of the utmost importance. These two vessels were from New York, via Canton, and after a winter trade on this coast they sailed again for China, by the way of the Sandwich Islands, where young Metcalf was killed by the natives, for some indiscretion in dealing with them; and his father barely escaped the same fate.

In 1790 Martinez was superseded by Captain Francisco Elisa, who in a wild way, continued to keep up the fiction of a Spanish Government at Nootka. In September of this year the American brig *Hope*, Captain Ingraham, left Boston for the west coast of America, and was followed soon after by the *Hancock*, Captain Crowell, the *Jefferson*, Captain Roberts, all of Boston, and the *Margaret*, Captain Magee, of New York. The *Hope* arrived at Queen Charlotte's Island on the 1st of June, 1791, Captain Ingraham naming the small harbor on the southeast side, where he anchored, Magee's Sound, in honor of one of the owners of his

vessel. Having collected a cargo of furs, and much interesting information about the country, which was minutely detailed in his journal, he left the coast in time to arrive in Canton Dec. 1st, of the same year.

On the 28th of September, a few days after the *Hope*, the *Columbia*, Capt. Gray, having made a voyage round the world, left Boston for her second voyage to this coast by the way of Cape Horn, and arrived at Clioquot, at the entrance to the Strait of Fuca, on the 5th of June, making almost the same sailing time as the *Hope*. From here Capt. Gray went to Queen Charlotte's or Washington's Island, as it was variously called, and according to his custom, passed a great portion of the summer in exploring the inlets and channels along the coast. In one of these, which he entered in latitude 54 deg. 33 min., he sailed a hundred miles without coming to the northern termination. Vancouver afterwards named this strait the *Portland Canal*. In exploring this passage, Gray had two of his men murdered by the natives. Soon after this misadventure, he returned to Clioquot, where he wintered on shore in a fortification which he erected, and called *Fort Defiance*—probably the first American fort on the west coast. Here he built the *Adventure*, and launched her; and here he came near being treacherously attacked by the followers of Wicanish, chief of the surrounding country, aided by Tatocheaticus, another chief, and abetted by a Sandwich Islander.

Not so, however, was Captain Gray of the *Columbia*, from Boston, to end his adventurous life. He was destined surely as quietly to put his countrymen in possession of the key to the north-west coast—to discover and to name the great "River of the West," whose exact location had so long evaded the longing eyes of explorers of all nations. In the meantime, the *Adventure* sailed for Queen Charlotte's Island, and the *Columbia* cruised along the coast southward on her destined way to an honorable and imperishable renown.

The effect of Mr. Meares' publications, coupled with the accounts of other Englishmen who had visited the northwest coast of America, stimulated the English government to fit out an exploring expedition to make a survey of the waters that washed these western shores; and the fact that a commission was rendered necessary by the recent treaty with Spain, furnished the apology for such a proceeding. Therefore, while Great Britain dispatched the *Discovery*, a ship well furnished with the most improved instruments for a scientific survey, commanded by Vancouver, a man well qualified for the work, she was not only looking to claiming all her rights to whatever English property might have been left at Nootka, but also to establishing new claims to territory by the right of discovery. There was belonging to this expedition, besides the *Discovery*, a smaller vessel, the *Chatham*, commanded by Lieut. Broughton, and a store-ship, the *Dadalus*, and several officers whose names were given to certain localities that will probably retain them while the English tongue is spoken on this continent.

As has already been said, Capt. Gray, with the ship *Columbia*, arrived a second time on the coast in June, 1791, and wintered near the entrance to the Strait of Fuca, where he built a small vessel, the *Adventure*, and having dispatched her up the coast for furs, himself set sail for a cruise southward, to see what he could find out new about the coast in that direction. While he was thus engaged, Vancouver was slowly coming to meet him from the

south, on his way to Nootka—where as yet Gray had not been, on this voyage—and with instructions from the English government to ascertain the number, situation, and extent of the settlements already made by civilized nations; and the nature and direction of any water passage, which might be navigated, between the Pacific and the provinces owned by Great Britain on the Atlantic side of the continent.

Before the English commissioner and the American fur-trader meet, let us review the position of Spanish affairs at Nootka. When Commandante Elisa arrived at that point in the spring of 1790, he brought with him the confiscated vessel, the *Princess Royal*, and two Spanish vessels, the *Princesa* and the *San Carlos*. The latter he dispatched, under the command of Saint Salvador Fidalgo, to inquire into the progress of the Russian settlements, and to examine the coast in that direction. But the expedition lasted only three months, and accomplished very little.

The prize ship, the *Princess Royal*, was placed in command of Saint Quimper, who was ordered to explore the Strait of Fuca. This attempt at exploration was as feeble as the other, Saint Quimper proceeding only about one hundred miles; when, seeing that there were channels branching off in every direction, and not being fitly prepared for an extended or thorough survey, he returned to Nootka, having done nothing more important than to name some of the passages leading from the eastern end of the Strait—as *Canal de Haro*, and *Rosario Strait*. That channel now called Admiralty Inlet, was named by Quimper *Canal de Camano*; Port Discovery *Port Quadra*; the bay next west of it, *Port Quimper*, and Clallam Bay, *Port Nunez Gamo*.

The following year, 1791, another expedition was sent out by the Spanish authorities, under an Italian navigator, who began his survey near Mount San Jacinto, and proceeded to examine the shore northward, looking still for the Strait of Anian! After all, it must have been a relief not to have found it; for it would have been necessary, with Spanish views of national affairs, to have fortified, and guarded it from use by the rest of the world. For Spain was practicing still her immemorial policy of exclusive right, struggling to keep her place among the nations as a first-rate power, yet sinking lower all the time, cursed with a religion that would not let her soar, but compelled her at last to crawl. Could Spain have cast off the fetters of Romanism in the 17th century, her people had the talent and the ardor to have risen to any height; failing to do this, they have gone through the valley of humiliation; and yet are not so humbled but they show again some signs of awakening power, which in the course of another century may restore them to the front rank of nations once more, when the name of Spaniard shall be a glory instead of a reproach.

To return to Vancouver. This talented and thoroughly equipped explorer, on arriving on the Oregon coast, began changing Spanish to English names—a cheap way of procuring credit as a discoverer. *Cape Blanco*, the westernmost point on the coast of Oregon, he changed to Cape Orford—but the change was not effectual in the case of the cape itself, and the name of Orford only attaches to the small harbor to the south of it. *Cape Arago* also still retains its Spanish name. In the latitude of the *Rio de San Rogue*, Vancouver began with interest to examine the appearance of the coast, for although Meares had said in his narra-