

**THE OREGON TERRITORY.  
CLAIMS, THERETO OF ENGLAND  
AND AMERICA CONSIDERED;  
ITS CONDITION AND PROSPECTS**

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THE OREGON TERRITORY. Claims, thereto of England and America considered; its condition and prospects by Alexander Simpson

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**ALEXANDER SIMPSON**

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THE  
OREGON TERRITORY.

CLAIMS

THERETO

OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA CONSIDERED;

ITS CONDITION AND PROSPECTS.

BY ALEXANDER SIMPSON, ESQ.

A LATE BRITISH RESIDENT THERE.

" Non ego sum vates, sed prius conatus "



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1846.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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IN the autumn of 1839, being then an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, I made the descent of the Columbia, or Oregon River, from a northern defile of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. I spent some months of the year 1840 in the Oregon country, and made visits during the same year to the Sandwich Islands, and to Monterey, the capital town, and San Francisco, the best harbour of California.

Circumstances placed me, in the year 1842, in the position of political agent for Great Britain at the Sandwich Islands.

I had, early, become convinced of the vital importance to British interests in the Pacific, of the sovereignty of that interesting group, and of its intrinsic value for the purpose of colonization. I felt confident of the right of England to this sovereignty : a right grounded on priority

of discovery, and repeated cession by the native chiefs. Its virtual subjection to American rulers was self-evident; and the danger of its being seized upon by the naval squadrons of France imminent. Thus influenced, I, unhesitatingly, took a prominent part in the bloodless *coup de main* by which the sovereignty of the group was, in February 1843, placed at the command of Her Britannic Majesty.\*

Immediately after its consummation, I took my departure for Britain,† charged with the self-imposed mission of personally representing to the Members of Her Majesty's Government, the importance of the acquisition thus made to Her Majesty's dominions.

Unknown, unfriended, utterly unacquainted

\* Of the circumstances connected with this affair, I have given a full detail in a pamphlet, "The Sandwich Islands," published by Smith and Elder, in October 1843.

† My first progress was in a very small schooner, commanded by a very young midshipman of the Carysfort frigate, to Mazattan on the west coast of Mexico. I traversed the Republic to Vera Cruz. There I was much disposed to have taken passage *via* the United States, but *luckily* found a Spanish coaster which landed me at Cuba. I say *luckily*, because the intense feeling excited in the States, by the receipt of intelligence of the measure in which I had been concerned, would have ensured me at least much insult, perchance in the Southern districts drawn upon me the tender mercies of Judge Lynch.



with politics and with politicians, my representations, though received with every courtesy, I may say kindness, by Lord Aberdeen and his colleagues in the Cabinet, were without effect. A recognition of the Sandwich Islands as an independent kingdom(!) was the decision arrived at. "That decision was taken," to use the words of the organ of the Foreign Office, "not from any want either of right (*of sovereignty*) or power to defend that right; but simply because it was held to be *inexpedient* to found a colonial establishment, and to awaken the jealousy of other countries for no purpose that cannot be equally secured by the maintenance of the independence of the country."

I considered then—still stronger reasons have I for considering now—that this was a most "untoward" decision. It was, as we have seen, formed avowedly on the ground of *expediency*; and was, I have the strongest reasons to believe, the result of interference in the matter by the Government of the United States. There the value to Great Britain of this acquisition of territory was at once appreciated. A naval station in the Pacific which should completely command the northern part of that ocean, including the western route to China, and the shores of the coveted

“Oregon” could not, quietly, be permitted to come into the possession of “grasping England.” The usual machinery of American diplomacy—*lengthy* Presidential Messages to Congress, excited discussions thereon, bellicose communications from the American Ambassador to Downing Street—was brought into operation to defeat my project—and with entire success.

Freed from the restraints of an official position, I published my views in relation to affairs in the Pacific. That these bore much reference to the Oregon (then, indeed, but a very “small cloud in the West”) will be rendered apparent by the following short extracts.

“When the feeling on the *North-Eastern* Boundary Question ran highest, the attention of the Americans was much more earnestly, though not so overtly, directed to the *North-West* territory. The country lying west of the Rocky Mountains, having an extent of coast of nearly one thousand miles, and averaging in breadth three hundred miles, is still open to both powers. England with a good right to the whole, claims only a part. The Americans, with no right to any part, claim the whole; and though their Executive is willing to make a division, it is doubtful whether the people—the

real Government—would sanction it. Yet Lord Ashburton, it was assumed, had settled every point in dispute!”

“The Columbia River and the Bay of San Francisco, are the outlets to the ocean of that vast territory known as ‘the Oregon,’ which is fast colonizing by American citizens, and which will, undoubtedly, ere twenty years are past, form a powerful Anglo-Saxon state, which will command the whole western coast of North America and the Northern Pacific Ocean.”

“We hold the barren islands of Bermuda at an immense expense, avowedly as a point of command over the American coast. I venture to say that the formation of a British Colony at the Sandwich Islands, and the placing there of two or three steam vessels of war, would be fully as powerful a check on the warlike propensities of our American brethren.”

“A restless American population is already pouring by *hundreds* into the Oregon country lying on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. They will soon pour in by *thousands*, for a route has been traced by which waggons pass, without the slightest difficulty, from the Missouri to the lower part of the Columbia River, and where waggons can pass *Westward* Americans will emigrate. The Oregon country is their *El*