

tive; and when they beheld the civilized population of America spreading along the coasts of the Pacific Ocean, and covering the territories between that ocean and the Rocky Mountains, the dreams of Russian ambition (if any were ever indulged) on our continent, would soon be dispelled.

To form an establishment, as before suggested, would not, in my humble opinion, be attended with any new or extraordinary demands on our treasury.

The employment of one or two of our ships of war, at present in commission, would cause little extra expense for the object in question. But, even admitting that a few hundred thousand dollars would be expended, of what importance is it, when compared to the magnitude of the objects to be accomplished? Can our public vessels be better employed than in a survey of our coasts, and in voyages of discovery? How many of our gallant officers would rejoice at an opportunity of seeing opened to their exertions a new path to fame? How many men of science would cheerfully embark in such expeditions?

Can a portion of our military be better employed than in exploring our newly acquired territories? How many of our brave officers would be proud of being appointed on such an expedition? How many naturalists and scientific men would cheerfully, at their own expense, accompany such an expedition?

I am perfectly aware that, in these days of retrenchment, any proposition that bears the features of new expenses, will be frowned on by some of our rigid economists; but, as the object suggested is one in which I humbly conceive the interests of our country, commercially and politically, are deeply involved, I flatter myself, the hints I have thus cursorily thrown out, will attract the consideration of our government and our citizens, and have their due weight at the present, or at some future period.

Very respectfully,

WILLIAM DAVIS ROBINSON.

To the HON. JOHN H. EATON.

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#### THE NORTH-WEST COAST

Doubts are entertained, by intelligent citizens, with whom we have conversed, of the policy and propriety of a disclosure, *at this time*, of the advantages which may probably result to the United States from the possession of an extent of coast on the Pacific. We were not aware, at the time of publishing Mr. Robinson's Memoir, that the

subject had been brought before the government several years ago, and that it had so far met with a favorable consideration, that the two frigates, *Guerriere* and *Java*, to be placed under the command of Commodore Porter, were selected to explore the north western quarter of our country. Nor were we informed, as we now are, that Mr. R. had had access to the documents which had produced this determination, one of which, in justice to the officer with whom the plan originated, is subjoined. This memoir was never intended for publication, and, although he may, as regards himself, feel the necessity, nothing but the circumstances above alluded to, could convince him of the propriety of now making it public. If there be any credit due, be it to whom it may belong. The plan, as proposed by Commodore Porter, has been acted on as far as the public interest would seem to require.

Washington, Oct. 31, 1815.

Sir:— Prompted by the desire of serving my country, and of using every effort for her honor and glory, unaided by the counsel or by the countenance of those high in authority, I come forward, a solitary individual, to suggest a plan of equal importance to any that has been undertaken by any nation, at any period, for enlarging the bounds of science, adding to the knowledge of men, and to the fame of the nation. But, without further preface, I propose to you to undertake a voyage of discovery to the north and south Pacific Oceans.

It may, at first view, appear strange, that at this late period, a voyage should be proposed, with a view to new discoveries; but let it be remembered, that so late as 1803, Russia fitted out two ships with this object in view, which expedition attracted the attention of the whole world—afforded important results—and the voyage of G. H. Von Langsdorff must be read with interest by all. Every nation has successively contributed in this way but us; we have profited by their labors; we have made no efforts of our own. Even the Dutch and Portuguese have shown a degree of enterprise, which has not been equalled by us, and when their sovereigns and nations shall otherwise have been forgotten, the voyages of their navigators will immortalize them. To the voyages of Juiros, Mendana, and others, the Spanish nation owes its chief fame; and the voyages of Cook, Anson, Vancouver, &c. are greatest boasts of England. The loss of *La Perouse* has proved to the world, how much they were interested in his fate, and the measures adopted by France, relating to him, during a period of anarchy, serve to show the pride and feeling of the nation. All nations, for *La Perouse*, envy France, and all mankind

deplore him. He had much to do — did much — and left much undone. Ships were sent in search of him, and of other objects, and failed from various causes. Of the objects pointed out to him for investigation, many are still left for others to investigate; and many interesting points in geography and science, still remain undetermined.

The most important features of Cook's voyages are descriptions of islands, and people which had been long before visited by the Spaniards and others — and, although that navigator has immortalized himself, his nation, and every man of the expedition, he has given us no new discoveries. The same may be said of Vancouver — yet the voyages of both will be read with interest, and will undoubtedly be of great utility to those which follow them. Minute as they may appear, there are yet great extents of ocean that have never been traversed by ships, and innumerable islands, of which we have only traditionary accounts. There are nations on this globe not known to civilized man, or, if known, known but imperfectly.

We, sir, are a great and rising nation. We have higher objects in view than the mere description of an island, which has been seen by others — the mere ascertaining the trade that may be carried on with a tribe of Indians. We possess a country, whose shores are washed by the Atlantic and the Pacific — a country on which the sun shines the greater part of his round — a country on which all the world have turned their eyes — and a country in which even monarchs have sought a refuge — of whose extent, resources and inhabitants, we are ourselves ignorant. We border on Russia, on Japan, on China — our trade is now of sufficient importance there to attract the attention, and excite the cupidity of an enemy. We border on islands which bear the same relation to the north-west coast, as those of the West Indies bear to the Atlantic states: islands, the chief of which are friendly in the utmost degree to our traders, without any knowledge of the nation to which they belong.—Other nations have there been represented by their ships, ours never. Others have contributed to meliorate their situation, and to introduce civilization amongst them, we have profited by their philanthropy, without having made any return — we have reaped all the advantages of the labors of others, and gratitude and duty now call loudly on us to add to their store.

The important trade of Japan has been shut against every nation except the Dutch, who, by the most abject and servile means, secured a monopoly. Other nations have made repeated attempts at an intercourse with that country, but, from a jealousy in the govern-

ment, and from other causes, (among which may be named a want of manly dignity on the part of the negotiators), they have all failed. Great changes have since taken place in the world — changes which may have affected even Japan; the time may be favorable, and it would be a glory, beyond that acquired by any other nation, for us, a nation of only forty years standing, to beat down their rooted prejudices — secure to ourselves a valuable trade, and make that people known to the world.

The same views may be had in regard to China, and if no results should be obtained, superior to those produced by the mission of Lord Macartney, we shall have an opportunity, by a display of our ships, to raise ourselves in the estimation of a people who know us now only as merchants.

Various other objects could be effected in this voyage. My views are general: the whole world is embraced in them. Let us visit those parts that have been perfectly explored; search out those of which we have only traditional accounts, and traverse those parts of the ocean over which a ship has never passed. Let men of science be employed by the different societies of America, to accompany the expedition, and suffer no means to be left untried by which we may profit.

Every thing now favors the object. The world is at peace. We have come honorably out of two naval wars: we have ships which require little or no additional expense — officers who will soon require employ, and who would be greatly benefitted by the experience; men of talents, in every part of the United States, who would take pride in placing their nation on an eminence with others.

An expedition, connected with the one by sea, might also be undertaken by land to the Pacific, and pursuing a course different from that followed by others. On arriving at the Pacific, they might be landed farther north or south, and return.

Washington might be made a first meridian for the United States, and the longitude of the discoveries made, calculated therefrom. Nations, undertaking similar expeditions, have invariably thought it necessary to ask passports from others for the ships. It would be well, perhaps, to consider whether the United States are not now in a state to undertake this voyage, without the aid of such passports.

With the highest respect, I have the honor to be your very obedient servant,

D. PORTER.

His Excellency JAMES MADISON,  
*President of the United States.*