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Alaska.
The Country and its Inhabitants.
A Lecture by the
Rev. J. A. Zahm, C. S. C.
Notre Dame, 1886.

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ALASKA.

THE COUNTRY

AND

ITS INHABITANTS.

A LECTURE

BY THE

REV. J. A. ZAHM, C. S. C.,

PROFESSOR OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE.

Delivered before the Students of Notre Dame University, December 9, 1885.

NOTRE DAME, INDIANA:
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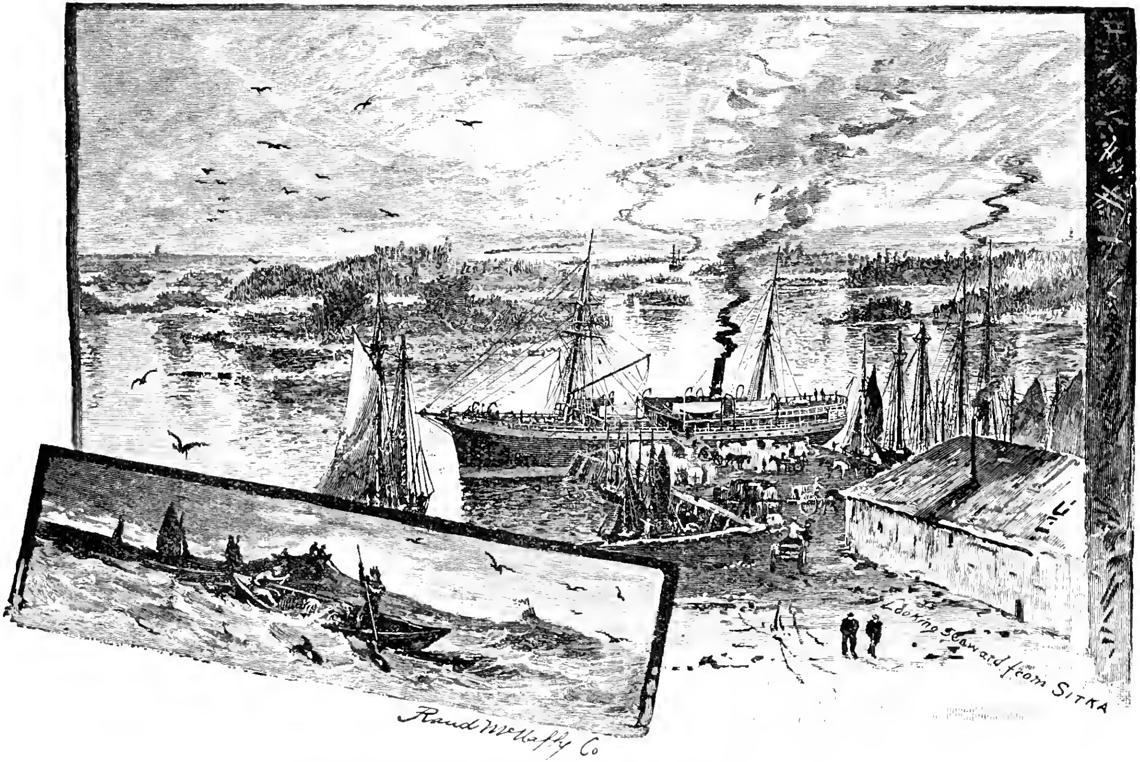

Looking seaward from SITKA
Rand McNally Co

ALASKA'S THOUSAND ISLANDS, AS SEEN FROM SITKA.

ALASKA.

THE COUNTRY AND ITS INHABITANTS.

I. THE COUNTRY.

GENTLEMEN: Eighteen years ago last March what was known as Russian America was, by special treaty, ceded to the United States. At the suggestion of Senator Sumner, the territory was given the name of Alaska, which it now bears. Alaska is a corruption of the Indian name Al-ak-shah, which means a great land or country. And it is indeed a great country. It is more than sixteen times as large as Indiana, and comprises territory equal to one-fifth of the rest of the United States. It extends nearly twenty-two hundred miles in a direct line from east to west, and measures some fourteen hundred from north to south. Owing to the numerous islands embraced by its large archipelagoes it has a shore line of upwards of twenty-four thousand miles,—considerably more than twice the combined lengths of the Atlantic and Pacific shore-lines of the United States. It has, too, within its boundaries the highest mountains, and, probably, the largest river on the North American continent. Mounts Fairweather and Crillon have an altitude of nearly sixteen thousand feet, whilst the colossus of the North—Mount St. Elias—towers up to a height of nearly twenty thousand feet, some thousands of feet above the grand peaks and volcanoes of Mexico—Orizaba and Popocatepetl. The great river Yukon has a length of over two thousand miles, and is navigable for fully three-fourths of that distance. For the last few hundred miles toward the mouth it is often several miles in breadth, and, where it pours its waters into the ocean, it widens out to such an extent that one is reminded of the mighty embouchures of the Amazon or Orinoco.

The people of Indiana consider themselves as living in the western part of the country, and yet they are over two thousand miles east of the central line of demarcation—running north and south—of Uncle Sam's vast possessions. The island of Attu, the westernmost land of Alaska, is as far west of San Francisco as is the easternmost point of Maine east of the City of the Golden Gate. Taken longitudinally, then, San Francisco would be the central city of the United States, whereas it is now regarded as belonging to the extreme West.

According to the treaty, the southern boundary of Alaska is in latitude 54° 40′, which should have been the northern boundary of our Pacific coast line, instead of 49° as it now is. Had it not been for the stupid treaty made in 1846 by President Polk and his secretary, James Buchanan, who allowed Great Britain to take the intervening 5° 40′, we should now have an uninterrupted coast-line from the Arctic ocean to the southern boundary of California. As it is, Great Britain controls some of the best ports on the Pacific coast, and threatens, now that the Canadian Pacific railroad is completed, to monopolize a great portion of the through trade between China, Japan and Europe. She has, without question, the shortest and most direct line, and will be able to make the transit between points in Asia and Europe ln several days' less time than any of her competitors. We are now beginning to see that the patriots of '46, who insisted on our northern boundary being "54° 40′, or fight," are the ones whose judgment should have been followed. As it is, we are obliged, in going from the United States to Alaska, to pass through British waters—unless we choose the deep, and often rough, waters of the Pacific—and can do that only by permtssion of British authority. Secretary Seward felt these drawbacks particularly at the time of the Alaska purchase, and realized them fully on the occasion of his visit to this country, some years later. But the matter is settled, and we are forced to make the best of a bad case.

I do not mean to say, however, that the purchase of Alaska was a bad bargain. On the contrary, as the years roll by we are beginning to learn the resources of the country, and to feel that in the purchase of Alaska the United States has added a vast, and, we may say, a rich empire to her already extensive possessions. On the occasion of a public dinner given him after his retirement from public life, Mr. Seward was asked what he considered the most important act of his official life. He unhesitatingly answered: "The purchase of Alaska;" and, after a moment's pause, he added, "but it may take two generations before the purchase is appreciated."

For Alaska the United Stated paid Russia $7,200,000—a little less than 2 cents per acre for the territory bought. At the time of the transfer the purchase was severely criticised by the press of the country, and commented on as "Seward's folly." Russian America was looked upon as an Arctic waste, a fit habitat, it might be, for Esquimaux and their dogs, and seals and polar bears, but utterly useless to civilized beings. It was regarded as a land where the thermometer was constantly below zero, and where the nights lasted for weeks and months. Country editors said, in their wisdow, that Mr. Seward had bought an immense ice-floe, and suggested that he name it "Polaria," as best expressing the character of the newly-acquired territory. Even in our own day there are many who entertain similar ideas regarding Alaska, and look upon its purchase as a foolish and extravagant expenditure of the nation's money.

It is indeed surprising that so little should be known about a country we have had in our possession for the last eighteen years, and which has attracted more or less attention ever since the time of Russia's great ruler, Peter the Great, who added Russian America to his then wonderfully organized and immense empire.

Many are the myths and marvels connected, directly or indirectly, with the history of the discovery of this northern land. After the straits of Magellan were discovered by the intrepid navigator whose name they bear, and taken possession of by the Spaniards, in whose service the illustrious Portuguese seaman was engaged, the united efforts of rival nations were directed towards finding a passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in the northern part of the continent of North America.

For two centuries English and Portuguese navigators were sent in search of the "Northwest Passage," which, it was considered certain, really existed. Spain, too, who then controlled the commerce of the Pacific, and who wished to retain her hold on her rich sources of revenue, sent out expeditions in search of the much-coveted passage, and many are the stories that have been told about the adventurers of bold mariners, who claimed that they really made the discovery of a channel leading from ocean to ocean—a channel to which they gave the name of "Straits of Anian."

Cortereal, a Portuguese navigator, sent out in 1500, claimed to have passed through the "Straits of Anian" by entering through Hudson Bay. In 1588 Maldonado, another Portuguese mariner, reasserted the existence of the passage referred to, and said that he had reached it by passing through the straits of Labrador. Four years later the celebrated Greek mariner, Juan de Fuca, in the service of Spain, was sent out by the viceroy of Mexico and pretended to have entered the "Straits of Anian" from the west, by entering the passage that now bears his name, and by going northward through what is now known as the "Straits of Georgia." In 1778, however, the great Captain Cook was sent out to the North Pacific coast, and showed that the pretended discoveries of the navigators just mentioned had no existence outside of their imaginations, and that the so-called "Northwest passage," as described by them, was a myth. Subsequent navigators who have made numerous and thorough surveys of these regions have verified Captain Cook's observations, and the once much-talked-of Northern passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific is now known in history only as the "Fabulous Straits of Anian."

True, little of positive knowledge regarding what is now known as Alaska was gained by the earlier navigators above mentioned, but they were instrumental in directing attention to this portion of the world. Nothing important in the way of discovery was accomplished until later. Peter the Great had in mind the exploration of the country, but died before he could carry out his plans. His wife, however, the Empress Catherine, took up the work, and it was continued by her successors, Anne and Elizabeth. In 1728 the illustrious Dane, Vitus Behring, was dispatched on an expedition of discovery, and first passed through the straits named after him, and travelled much of the ocean between Northern Asia and what is now known as Alaska. He visited many of the islands of the Aleutian chain, and after many hardships was shipwrecked on a small island, where he, with most of his crew, died of starvation and disease. This small island, that served as a resting-place for his remains, has been named in his honor, as has also the sea he explored so well.

In 1788 Gerassim Pribyloff, a Russian navigator, discovered the Seal Islands, the two lergest of which—although they are small—have been named St. Paul and St. George. They at once became the centre of a rich fur trade, and tens of thousands of seal skins were annually taken to China and overland, through Siberia, to Russia.

Strange to say, at the time of the cession of Alaska, no account was taken of these islands, although they have since proven to be the most lucrative portion of the purchase. The Seal Islands, at best, are only rocky patches in the ocean, and their combined areas would not be much more than one-eighth of one of our average-size counties in Indiana. St. Paul is 6x13 miles, and St. George only 6x10 in extent. And yet, since 1870, when these rocky islets were leased to the Alaska Commeriial Company, the Government has realized, on St. Paul and St. George alone, over two-thirds of the whole amount paid for the entire territory of Alaska. The company has already paid into the United States treasury over $5,000,000, and the Government has secured an interest of more than 5 per cent. on its full investment.

The islands are leased to the Alaska Commercial Company for a period of twenty years—from 1870 to 1890—at an annual rental of $55,000.

Besides this, the company pays the Government $2.62½ for each of the 100,000 seal skins it is permitted to take each year. This gives a revenue of over $300,000 annually—a revenne that is likely to be much increased at the expiration of the present lease. And as the number of seals does not seem to decrease, notwithstanding the number that is annually killed, we may look upon the Seal Islands as the source of a permanent industry, and as capable of supplying the markets of the world with seal skin sacques for an indefinite time to come. The only possibility, seemingly, of the seal industry ceasing to be profitable is the chance that seal skin sacques may go out of fashion. In the event of such a change our fur traders will, of course, lay the blame on fickle woman.

In speaking of the Seal Islands I would say, incidentally, a word about the habitat of seals. Many persons are under the impression that they are found everywhere in Alaskan or Arctic waters; but nothing could be farther from the truth. We have, for instance, seen in some of our illustrated papers pictures of seal-fishing and walrus-hunting amid icebergs in the bay of Sitka. But the fact is, one may travel up and down the coast of Alaska a dozen times wsthout observing a single seal, while he may watch in vain for one in Sitka bay for months. A walrus may not be seen in years. By far the greatest proportion of all the seals in the world are found at the foggy islands of St. Paul and St. George, where the animals assemble in millions during a few weeks in summer, when the number allowed by law is taken, and their skins shipped to San Francisco, and thence to London, to be prepared for the market. But these islands are far from the mainland of Alaska. St. Paul is 1,491 miles west of Sitka and full 2,600 miles northwest of San Francisco.

It may interest some of you to know that Senator Miller, of California—the President of the Alaska Commercial Company, and the one to first call attention to the resources of Alaska—was formerly a student of Notre Dame. I had the pleasnre of meeting him this summer, as he, with his family, were among the passengers on board our steamer, and he had many questions to ask regarding old friends still living at his *Alma Mater*. He has promised to stop off to see them on his way to Washington this fall.

Besides its seals, Alaska has many other fur-bearing animals. Among these may be mentioned the fox of several species—among them the beautiful and the much-prized silver fox,—the beaver, squirrel, wolf, bear, marten, ermine, and the animal that furnishes the most valuable of furs, the otter. These are found in great numbers and add considerably to the general industries of the country. From an early date the Hudson Bay Company recognized the value of Alaska as a land abounding in fur-bearing animals and had numerous trading posts established throughout the territory, many of which it still retains.

But the resources of Alaska are not limited to the fur-bearing animals, of which I have been speaking. These constitute an important factor, if you will, but there are others that promise to be equally valuable, if they are not already so. Among these may be mentioned its fish, that abound to an extent that would be incredible to one who has not visited the country; its extensive forests of valuable timber: and its rich and unlimited mineral lodes.

For its fisheries Alaska has become famous already, although it is only a few years since they were established. Alaska salmon have a preference in the markets, especially those of the Pacific coast, and are rapidly becoming known in the markets of the East. Columbia river salmon have long retained an acknowledged superiority; but Alaska salmon, of which there are several species, are far better. From Dixon's entrance at the southern boundary of Alaska to the mouth of the Chilcat river—in latitude 60°—one will find large canneries where thousands of barrels of salmon are put up annually. And the number of these beautiful fish taken at one haul of the seine—and they use large nets there—almost passes belief. At one of the large canneries that I visited the average haul for the season was 1,700 salmon, each averaging seven and eight pounds in weight. On one occasion the seine brought in 4,000. This may sound like a fish story here, but there can be no such thing as a fish story in Alaska. There, fact is stranger than fiction in matters piscatorial. The waters at certain seasons of the year are actually alive with fish, and as they move in large schools through the narrower channels, a canoe scarcely finds room for passage.

Besides salmon, various other kinds of valuable fish are found in as great abundance. Cod, herring, halibut, trout, etc., are met with in all the waters along the coast. At Killisnoo, where we stopped for a while, and where there is a large cannery, herring are caught for making oil and guano. Here the number taken at one haul of the net is much greater than in the case of fishing for salmon. I think one could safely say that there are in Alaskan waters alone sufficient fish, of the best kinds, to supply the markets of the world for centuries to come.

Then, too, the large and unexplored forests of Alaska promise to become eventually a rich source of revenue. Hon. Wm. H. Seward, after his visit to the country, declared that "the north Pacific coast will become a common shipyard for the American continent, and speedily for the whole world." Although the great statesman may have been over sanguine in his views on this matter, it is evident to even the casual observer that he did not express himself as quoted without reason. On every side, from Victoria to Chilcat and Sitka, one sees immense forests of spruce, fir, larch, cypress, hemlock and that most valuable of woods, yellow cedar. And we doubt not that soon the lumber interest will here receive its due share of attention. The forests of Michigan, Wisconsin and the Puget Sound region are rapidly disappearing before the woodman's axe, and it is only a question of time until we shall have to look elsewhere for timber lands; and then, if not before, the value of Alaska as a lumber district will be fully appreciated.

But just at present the mines of the country, especially the gold mines, are attracting more attention than anything else. For several years past, placer mining along the Stikine river, and about Juneau and Sitka, has been quite profitable to the few engaged in it. Within the last year or so, however, special interest has been excited in developing the rich quartz lodes that occur in the neighborhood of Sitka, but more especially in those of Douglas Island near Juneau. Here I found, to my great surprise, what is said to be one of the largest quartz mills in the world. This will, I know, be news to most of you, as it was a revelation to me. The Treadwell mine, which has been quietly worked for some two or three years, now runs day and night 120 stamps and forty-eight concentrators. The amount of ore crushed daily runs up to 360 tons. The quartz crushed assays from $8 to $20 per ton, and the sulphurets obtained from concentrators will give from $80 to $150. The ledge, which crops out from the surface, is over 400 feet in width, and of unexplored depth and length. A horizontal tunnel has been run into the side of the hill where the ledge occurs to a distance of 430 feet, and a vertical shaft has been sunk to meet this tunnel. These show ore in sight sufficient to last the mill, now running, for years to come. The ore is low grade, it is true, but it is milled so cheaply that it pays handsome dividends to the fortunate stockholders of the mine. The machinery is all run by water power, obtained from the mountain streams near by, and it is estimated that the milling does not cost more than $1 or $1.50 per ton. Only eight men are engaged in the mill proper, and I was told that six would be sufficient to do the work. Besides the stamps and concentrators, there are large revolving cylinders in an adjacent building for roasting the sulphurets and numerous large chlorination vats for eliminating the gold from the ore after it is roasted. In another building hard by are two or three large retorts, where the gold is separated from the mercury, after which it is melted and cast into bars or bricks. The steamer on which we returned from Alaska carried to San Francisco upwards of $100,000 in gold bricks, as the result of twenty days "cleaning up." Stock in the mine has never been put on the market and cannot be had except by paying many times its face value. The owners, a few California capitalists, say they have "a good thing and are going to hold on to it."

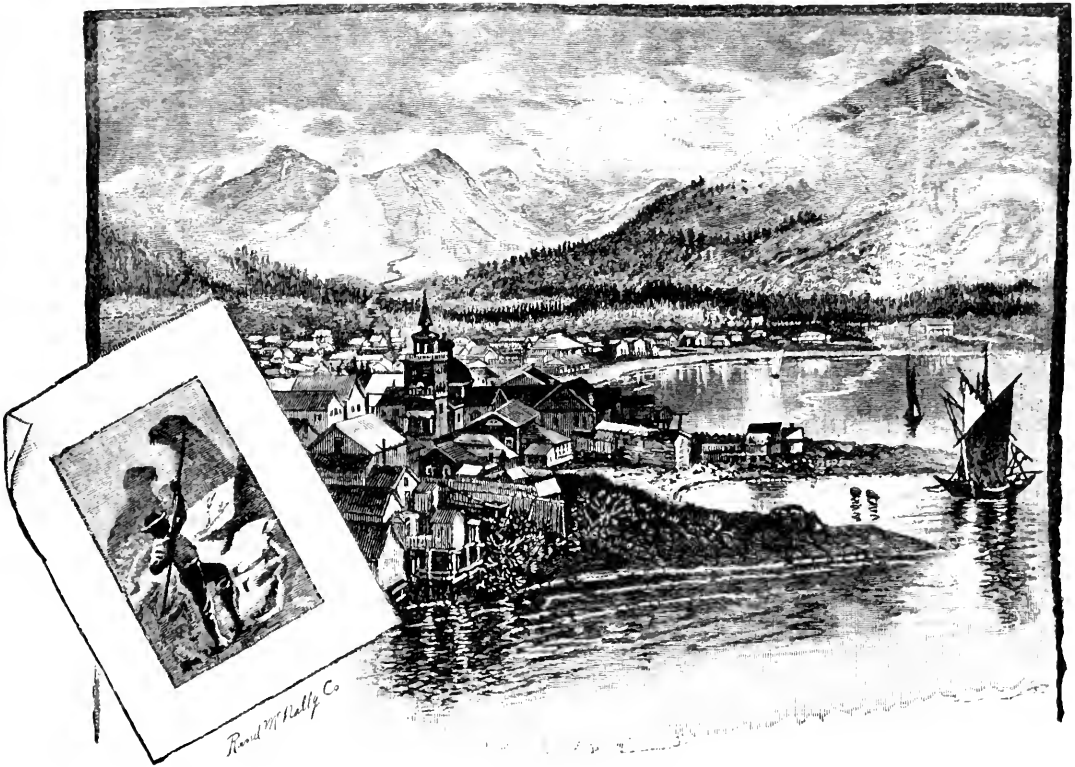
The claims adjoining the Treadwell mine are said to be equally valuable, and are only awaiting the advent of capital to develop them. From present indications this prosperous mining camp bids fair to become another Leadville—or, rather, another Virginia City,—and that, too, at no distant day. The amount of ore known to exist here appears to be practically unlimited, and from my own observations I should judge that it can be worked as cheaply here—if not more cheaply—as it can be in any other mine I have ever visited.

For some years past the Yukon region has received considerable attention from prospectors; and, from discoveries already made, there is reason to believe that several mines of more than ordinary value have been located. The Yukon mines, however, will always suffer the disadvantage of a severe winter climate, which does not affect those along the coast from Sitka southwards.

Besides gold, ores of nearly all the other metals are found in greater or less quantities in almost every part of the territory. Coal, too, occurs, but, as yet, little has been done towards developing anything but the gold mines, which here have always received, and now receive, the greatest attention.

But what, it may be asked, about the climate of Alaska? The development, on a large scale, of some of the industries spoken of, especially mining, will largely depend on the climate.

This question cannot be answered in a word, any more than a similar question regarding the United States. From the great extent of Alaska one should naturally expect to find a varied climate, especially when one considers that so much of it is surrounded by water. It goes without saying that all, or nearly all, of the northern portion has a climate of Arctic severity, especially in the winter time. But this is far from true of the southwestern portion, particularly the part bounded by the ocean. It may surprise many to learn that the winter climate of Sitka and the neighboring coast, for instance, is much milder than that of Notre Dame and the surrounding country, having the same mean temperature as Notre Dame. During the fifty years that records were kept by the Russians, the thermometer at Sitka was observed below zero only four times, and then only for a short while. Last winter, for instance, it was extremely mild, although it was so frightfully cold everywhere in the States. The greatest snow-fall there last winter was only two inches, and then snow lay on the ground only a few hours. Cattle remained out doors all winter without suffering any inconvenience. Ice scarcely ever forms on the water there, and rarely attains a thickness of more than an inch. Skating and sleigh-riding are luxuries practically unknown. At the Treadwell mine, already spoken of, it was not found necessary to shut down the mill more than two or three



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VIEW OF SITKA.

days last winter. Even then it was done simply as a precautionary measure, as the mill might have continued in operation, because the water in the pipes and reservoirs did not freeze as was apprehended. This, for a mill that is run by water-power entirely, and for this high latitude, is, to say the least, remarkable; but it only goes to show that the miner here does not labor under such great disadvantages in winter as is popularly supposed. True, the mean annual temperature there would be considered comparatively low at Notre Dame. But then it is very uniform, never very warm nor very cold. In 1883 the mean summer temperature, according to the records kept by the signal service stationed there, was 53°. The mean temperature for the winter of the same year was 34°. In summer the weather during the day is somewhat like it is in the Middle States in spring or autumn. In the evening it is some cooler, and one then finds a heavy coat or wrap quite comfortable. It will cease to be a matter of surprise that there is there such a mild and agreeable climate, when it is remembered that the whole western coast of Alaska is washed by a warm ocean current, similar to the Gulf stream of the Atlantic, which so tempers the climate of Great Britain and Scandinavia. Along the coast of the North Pacific the moderating agent is known as the Kuro Siwo, or Japan current, and its influence is felt way up beyond "Behring's Strait."

Paradoxical as it may appear, the nights of Sitka are no cooler during summer than they are in the city of Mexico, 40° farther south. It was my good fortune to spend some time in the latter place, last summer a year, and I found that a heavy overcoat after sunset was not at all uncomfortable. But an altitude of over seven thousand feet accomplishes for the temperature of the city of Mexico what high latitude, tempered by warm ocean currents, effects for that of Sitka.

From what I have said regarding the mean temperature of Sitka—and the same holds good for all the coast region to the southeast—it can readily be inferred that Alaska will never amount to much for grazing or agricultural purposes. True, in some parts grasses grow well and attain a height of several feet. Various kinds of vegetables are also successfully cultivated here and there, but only in small quantities. Potatoes seem to thrive, as is evinced in many gardens in and about Sitka; but as to Indian corn and the various cereals, their cultivation appears to be out of the question.

The annual rainfall in Sitka and all along the southeast coast is something extraordinary to any one but a "Web-foot." The rainfall in Sitka in 1883 amounted to eighty-one inches.

And the way it rains in Alaska—at least along the southern coast! The ease and self-complacency with which it comes on and falls, and continues to fall, day after day, and week after week—a result acquired by constant practice I suppose—without hurry, without bluster, without wind or storm, is something that must be witnessed to be appreciated. First comes a pure Scotch mist, then a dense fog, then a light, gentle, drizzling rain, and continues without any apparent effort until one imagines that it is never going to cease. But it does at last, often only after a long time, and then one is blest with a clear, light, bracing atmosphere and a bright, serene sky, that could scarcely be found elsewhere in the wide world. Then one forgets the fog and the rain, and thinks only of enjoying the warmth and sunshine—and one does enjoy it.

But what about the many scenic and other attractions that present themselves to the visitor to Alaska? A volume would not do them justice—there are so many, new, interesting, matchless. From Victoria to Sitka one can make a voyage that for magnificent scenery cannot be duplicated, I opine, in any other part of the world. All along, the steamer moves on the calm, placid waters of the numberless inland bays, channels, sounds and narrows, that are linked together and hidden away among the mountains that border the mainland on the one side, and those that rise up from the thousand and one islands, large or small, on the other. During the entire trip one is exposed to the swell of the sea only a few hours, and such a thing as sea-sickness troubles the voyager as little as if he were on *terra firma*. And then the magnificent and constantly changing panorama that one has always before him! At one time the beauties of the Scotch lakes, at another those of Killarney, and Como, and Maggiore. Anon the scene changes, and we have the glories of the Rhine, and the Hudson, and the Columbia. Near by we have beautifully-wooded islands that eclipse in number and loveliness the far-famed Thousand Isles of the St. Lawrence, and the less known, but no less beautiful, islands of Northern Lake Superior, and in the distance snow-capped mountains that rival anything to be seen in the Sierras or Swiss Alps. Now and then we meet pretty little cascades and lovely waterfalls, of greater or less magnitude, that seem to complete the picture.

But this is not all. We have near us, and around us on every side, glaciers of every size, type and formation. They come down from the mountain's crest through rocky defiles and deep gorges—reminding one of Colorado's grand canons—and break off into the water only a few yards from the vessel, with a thundering noise that resembles a discharge of artillery, and form the thousands of icebergs that are visible in the watars of the North. Here we have glaciers, miles in width, at the water's edgs, and hundreds of feet in perpendicular height, and scores of miles in length. I have known people to go to Switzerland only to see the

Alps; and yet in all Switzerland there is nothing to be compared with the glaciers and snow-capped peaks that are found here in all their splendor and magnificence. The *Mer de Glace*, the *Grindewald*, the *Aletsch* — the "monarch of European ice-streams"—and the *Zermatt* and *Jungfrau* and *Matterhorn* pale into insignificance when compared with the wonders of Glacier Bay and the Fairweather Alps. Speaking of Muir Glacier, which I had the pleasure of examining, a writer of the *New York World* lately observed that "all the glaciers of Switzerland would not equal this of Glacier Bay." Lord Dufferin, speaking of the scenery of British Columbia and Alaska, said: "It is the most superb in the world!" And another traveller, referring to the scenery I have just been speaking of, writes: "This fairyland of moving extravaganzas of scenery was an amalgamation of Switzerland, Norway, the St. Lawrence, with her rapids and islands, the pictueresque loveliness of Loch Katrine, added to arctic wonders of a high altitude of 60°." Prof. Muir, the learned Pacific coast geologist, says of the valley of the Stikine, which has its mouth near Fort Wrangle, that "it is a Yosemite 100 miles long."

I have introduced these opinions of others lest some of you might think my account of the natural wonders of this country exaggerated. But it would be difficult to exaggerate what one can see simply from the deck of the steamer, as she goes from Victoria to Sitka. No mere description can do justice to the wonders everywhere visible, and that follow each other in rapid succession in a kaleidoscopic manner that seems almost magical. One must visit these scenes to appreciate the splendor and magnitude of the objects mentioned. This can now be done in a short time, and at a comparatively slight expense. Meeting the wants of tourists who are already beginning to drift in this direction, the Pacific Coast Company runs a monthly steamer from Portland to Sitka, touching at all intervening points of interest. The July steamer, on which I took passage, was filled with tourists from all parts of the United States, and they would, I am sure, all reiterate everything I have said about the wonderful scenery we witnessed during the whole course of our journey. The various Indian tribes, too, whose peculiar little villages are scattered all along the shore, the rich fauna and flora, and the great abundance of game of all kinds—which makes the country a veritable paradise for sportsmen—combined with the many beauties and wonders I have already spoken of, will contribute to make Alaska eventually what Lord Dufferin prophesied of this northeast coast—"The favorite yachting grounds of the world."

The tourist from the East can easily so arrange his journey to Alaska as to be constantly passing through the most marvelous scenery in the world. Starting from Chicago, for instance, let him take the Chicago and

Northwestern Railroad—a road famed for its accommodations and luxuries of every kind—and go to St. Paul. There he will connect with the great Trans-Continental route—the Northern Pacific—which will take him to New Tacoma on Pugent Sound. On his way he will pass the Yellowstone Park—the acknowledged wonder-land of the world. Here he will see geysers, eclipsing the grandest that Iceland or New Zealand can boast of: waterfalls, rivaling those of Niagara and the Yosemite; and canons, inferior, if at all, only to those of Colorado, and those made by the river of the same name further south and west. From Chicago to Tacoma, by the roads named, one will always have the convenience of dining cars,—the Northern Pacific being the only Trans-Continental road to afford its patrons such a luxury,—and the most improved styles of chair and sleeping cars. From the car the traveller will see the beauties of Cœur d'Alene lake, and the world-renowned wonders of the Columbia River—the cascades and the Dalles. At Portland or Tacoma he takes the steamer in which he will enjoy about three weeks of general repose, free from the worry and turmoil of a busy world, and breathing an atmosphere that seems to possess all the invigorating properties attributed to the Elixir of Life, of the alchemists of old. At the end of five or six weeks, having passed through a succession of fairy-lands and wonder-lands, one can be back in Chicago and ready to enter again, with renewed vigor, upon the duties of life.

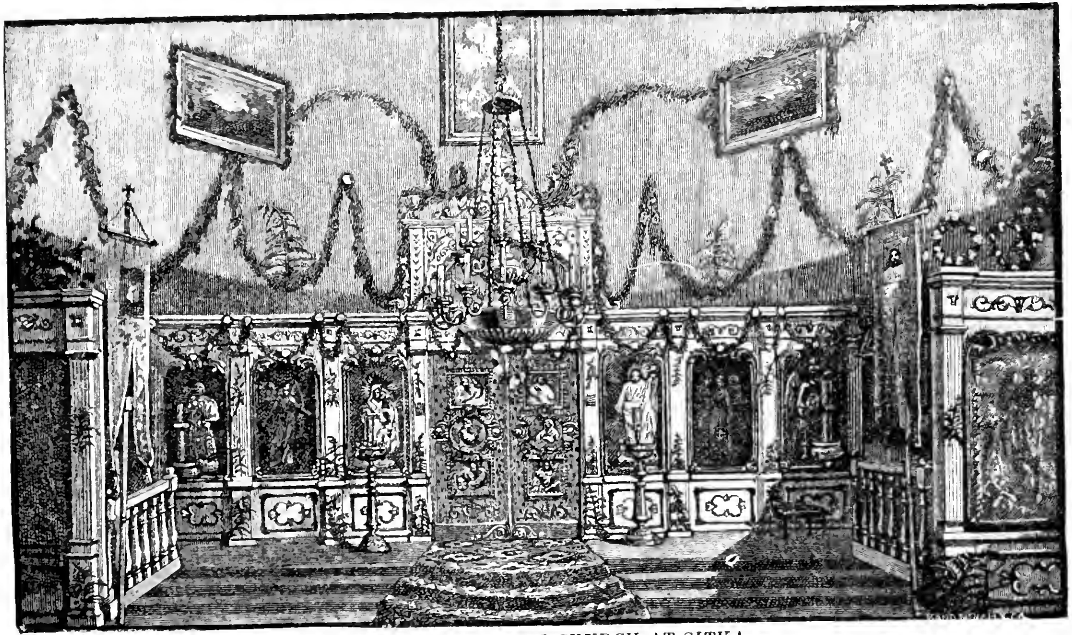
II. THE INHABITANTS.

SO far I have been speaking to you of the natural and economic features of this interesting but imperfectly known country, but have said little, and then only incidentally, of its people, their manners and customs, and of their means of subsistence. Many, probably the majority of you, I take it, will be more interested in hearing something of the people than of the country itself. It is the people the tourist wishes to see when he visits a new country; and their peculiarities attract probably more attention than the country's scenery, however beautiful or grand it may be. He wishes to know something about their language, their traditions, their habits of thought, and their peculiar modes of living. So it is with people generally. They always desire a wider acquaintance with the various branches of the extensive family to which they belong.

Before it was ceded to the United States, Alaska, as is well known, belonged to Russia by right of discovery. Hence one meets in the country many Russians, either native or by descent. But the number is rapidly decreasing, being now only a small fraction of what it was when the country was a dependency of the Czar. Still there are found several Greek churches in the territory, but most of them are in the Aleutian Islands. The only one of any consequence on the mainland is in the south-eastern portion of Alaska, at Sitka. It is one of the most notable structures in the town, and is built in the form of a Greek cross, surmounted by an emerald-green dome, in which is a very fine chime of bells. The interior of the church is quite richly decorated, and is ornamented with a number of rich paintings of the Muscovite or Russio-Byzantine style. There are kept here also some very rich vestments and candelabra; but since the purchase of the country by the United States, the richer vestments and ornaments have been returned to Russia.

In its day, Sitka was a place of almost imperial splendor, and the Russian governors held court here in a style that contrasted most strongly with the plain and simple democratic form of government that now obtains. Sitka, too, has been the seat of a Greek bishopric; and it is the glory of this see that one of its bishops, Innocent Veniaminoff, was recalled to Russia and made the metropolitan of Moscow, the highest position in the Greek Church. Under Russian rule, Sitka had its schools, and likewise boasted of an ecclesiastical seminary. In its halcyon in Alaska the Greek Church had seven missionary districts, and counted some twelve or fifteen thousand communicants. But now everything is changed. The bishopric of Alaska has been transferred from Sitka to San Francisco, and the number of members belonging to the Church has greatly diminished. Father Metropolski, assisted by a deacon, has charge of the parish of Sitka; and although his flock is now small, the number—composed of Russians, half-breeds, and others—is still decreasing. Among the passengers who were on our steamer, were two of his daughters—Nija and Xenia—who had been going to school at the Acrdemy of the Sisters of St. Anne, in Victoria, B. C.; and although Russian is their native tongue, they speak English with the same fluency as they do their own language, and show a more than ordinary degree of intelligence. Like all the priests of the Greek Church in America, Father Metropolski receives his salary from the imperial treasury of Russia. It may not be generally known, but it is nevertheless a fact, that the Russian Government annually sends to the consistory at San Francisco 100,000 rubles to be distributed among the missions of the Greek Church in America, and most of this goes to the churches of Alaska.

Besides Russians, there is a gradually-increasing number from the United States. These are chiefly interested in mining, fishing, hunting for furs, and in general trading. The total number as yet is not great—not



INTERIOR OF GREEK CHURCH AT SITKA.

exceeding, probably, in the whole territory more than a few thousand souls, and most of these are found in Fort Wrangle, Juneau and Sitka, and a few mining camps. Still, if the mines lately discovered meet the expectation of their owners—and there is every reason to believe that they will—the number of people from the United States must soon be much greater there than it is at present.

In Alaska, too—would you believe it?—we find the soon-to-be omnipresent Chinaman. In Fort Wrangle, for instance, Chinatown is confined to a large boat that used to ply up and down the Stikine River, when the Cassiar mines were "in bonanza," but which now lies on the beach as an old and almost useless hulk. In Juneau one meets them, and in the celebrated Treadwell mine, of which I have already spoken, they constitute, it would seem, a majority of the workmen employed in drilling and blasting. I have never gotten on a steamer anywhere in the territory without coming across some of them. Often during my visit to the country did I recall the prediction of the late General Gordon: that it was only a question of time until the Chinese would overrun the world, and become, not its servants, but its rulers. And when one sees how they have taken possession in many parts of the Pacific coast, and how they have fastened themselves like a cancer on the richest and fairest parts of the two most important cities west of the Sierras—San Francisco and Portland—one cannot help thinking the illustrious general had reason for speaking as he did. No one who has not witnessed their blighting influence on the parts they inhabit in the cities named would credit it; and no one who has not observed their untiring industry, and noted their persistence in thrusting themselves forward, in spite of all legislation to check them, would believe their ultimate domination among things possible. But here is a fact. It is only a short time since they began to come to our country in any numbers, and now between San Diego and Sitka, they are counted by the tens of thousands—no fewer than thirty thousand being in San Francisco alone, not to speak of the multitudes scattered throughout the United States. It is well for Eastern sentimentalists to talk about the equality allowed by the Constitution to all men, but I venture to say that if these same Utopians were to make a study of the "heathen Chinee," as he is found in California and Oregon, or even in Alaska, their ideas regarding Anti-Chinese Legislation would be wonderfully modified. But this is a digression.

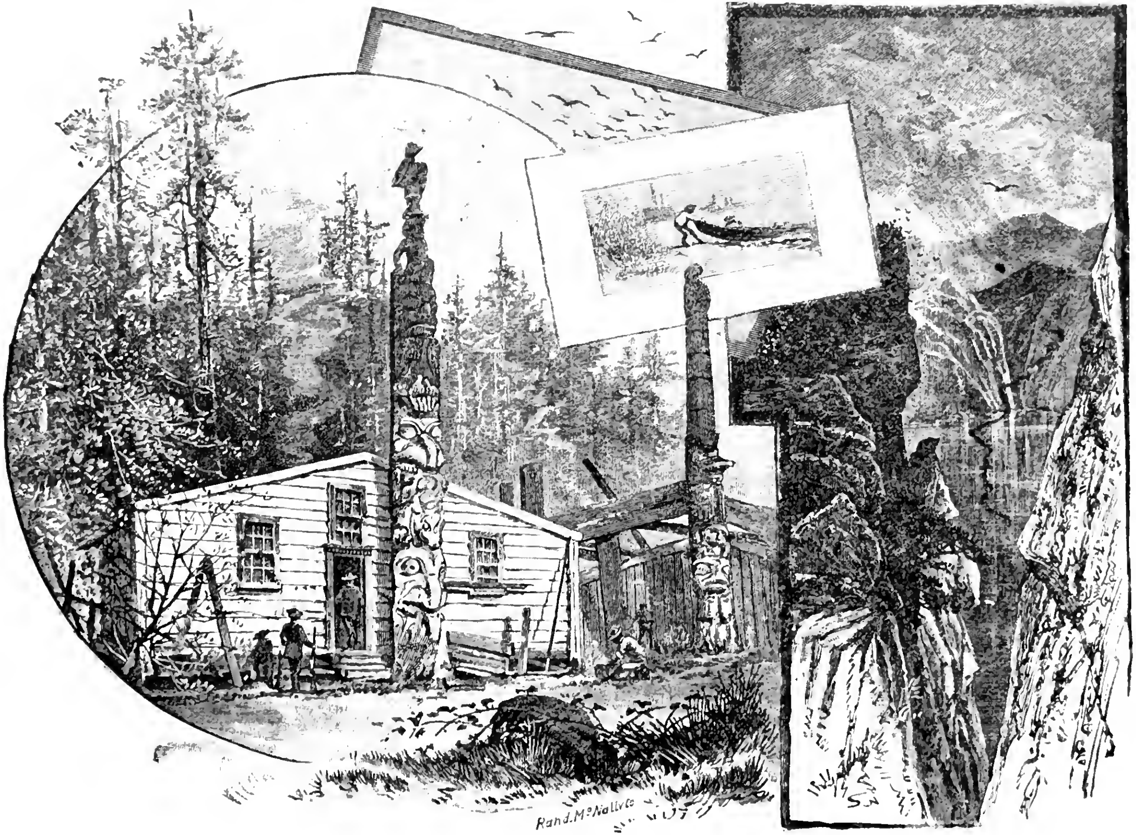
The major part of the population of Alaska is, of course, composed of the various Indian tribes who are distributed over it from the territory occupied by the Hydas of the south to that inhabited by the Esquimaux of the north. Their number is variously estimated at from 30,000 to 50,000. So far, however, it is like the census of an Arabian city—something that, as yet, "no man has found out."

The Indian villages are for the most part scattered along the coast and the various water courses of the country. The population of any one village is never very large, although at certain times of the year, when the hunting season is over and the hunters have returned to their homes, one may, in a few instances, find as many as a thousand or more people living in one place. Unlike the Indians of our plains, they rarely live in tents, except when moving from place to place. They construct houses, or huts rather, twenty or thirty feet square--and in some cases larger--of large, thick, upright planks or the bark of trees, and some of their dwellings, it must be said, show evidences of considerable comfort. As a rule, there is only one room in the house; but occasionally one finds it partitioned off into a number of smaller rooms used as sleeping apartments. There is only one entrance to the house in the typical Indian dwelling—a door a few feet above the ground--and no windows,. In the more pretentious buildings one always finds a plank floor, in the centre of which there is a small depression, and an area prepared for the fireplace. The smoke ascends through an opening in the centre of the roof, and contrary, to what might be expected, the inmates are troubled with very little smoke in the building itself. Indeed, I have visited some Indian houses that were comparatively models of neatness. In the older Indian dwellings the planks used are split or hewn from large logs; but in those sections of the country in which saw-mills have been established, or where lumber can be obtained, sawn boards are much used, and in these cases an Indian village would not differ much from a Western mining camp in the States. Frequently, too, the Indians build their houses of logs, and they are so constructed as to be quite comfortable even during the coldest days of winter.

Their beds consist of skins or blankets, which are placed in the corners and along the sides of the house, and they have usually such a large supply of them that there is never any suffering from want of covering. Indeed, the average Indian's wealth in this country is measured by the number of skins and blankets in his possession. Some of them count their blankets by the hundreds, and they hold on to them with the same tenacity with which their distant relations in the States cling to a Government bond. Occasionally, however, they dispose of them, but only with the hope of getting them back again with a handsome interest.

Gift-feasts—“potlatches” they are called here—are common among them; and an Indian's standing in his tribe is determined by the number of blankets and presents of other kinds he is able to give his guests. An ambitious Indian will toil and moil for years, investing all his earnings in blankets, with the hope of one day giving a potlatch that will outdo anything that has been attempted by his neighbors; and should he never receive any substantial return for his generosity, he is satisfied to be able to tell his children and his grandchildren of the grand potlatch he once gave his friends. One, potlatch, however, pre-supposes another. All the guests who have attended a potlatch are supposed to give one also, and in this way their host gets back as much as he gave away, and his hope always is that he will receive more. If an Indian builds a new house he has a "house-warming" in the way of a potlatch; if he aspires to a position of trust, and wishes to secure the suffrages of his fellows, he secures their good will, or bribes them, if you prefer it, with a potlatch. He can never hope to become a "tyee" (chief) without bankrupting himself beforehand with a potlatch, and his importance as a tyee is in a measure gauged by his liberality in distributing presents. When Secretary Seward visited the territory he immortalized himself among the Indians by the magnificence of his gifts; and he is to this day remembered there as the "big tyee of the United States."

Among the most striking objects of interest to the visitor to an Indian village in southwestern Alaska are their quaint and curious *totem* poles. These are large poles, thirty forty, and even sixty feet high, and of proportionate diameter, on which are carved the forms of various animals and birds. They are usually erected in front of the house, and an Indian's rank is judged by the size of his *totem*. It is a kind of a genealogical tree, on which is carved in a sort of hieroglyphical language, intelligible to the Indians, the history of the family of the owner. In Wrangel and Howkan the number and size of the *totems* are quite remarkable. On some is carved—rather rudely, one may imagine—the figure of the bear; on another that of the eagle; whilst on the third one may see that of a whale or raven. On some *totems*, again, are found several figures, one above the other. The tribes being divided into different families, named after the bear, raven, wolf, etc., one can, by looking at his *totem*, see into what families an Indian has married, and what relation he bears to other families of his tribe. An Indian belonging to the family of the bear, for instance, may not marry into the family of the bear, but must look for a consort among some of the other numerous families of his tribe, as that of the eagle, the wolf or the whale. In making his *totem* the Indian, unlike ourselves, will trace his genealogy from his mother's side. Suppose, for example, his grandfather on his mother's side belonged to the raven family, his father to the eagle family, and himself to the bear family, his *totem* would have the figures of the raven carved at the bottom, that of the eagle next above, and that of his own family, the bear, would surmount the other two. But these crests or emblems are not confined to the *totem* poles only. They are marked on the houses, canoes, blankets, clothing, culinary utensils, etc., and, like a stamp or impress, they serve to indicate who are their owners.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TOTEM POLES.

But it is in his canoe that the Alaskan Indian shows his greatest ingenuity, and in it he takes his greatest pride. It is to him what the pony is to the red man of the plains, and he looks after it with as much care as does an Arab after a favorite steed. They are hewn out of large logs, and are sometimes full sixty or seventy feet long, and eight or ten feet wide, and capable of containig 100 persons. One of the attractions at the Centennial, as some of you may remember, was an Indian canoe from Alaska that measured eighty feet in length and about three feet in depth, and was designed, when fully manned, to have forty paddles on each side. Such a canoe, we may judge from the descriptions left us, tallies closely, in size and form, at least, with the war galleys of ancient Greece and Rome. But in grace and beauty, and the rapidity with which they can be propelled through the water, they are, I presume to say, superior to any galley ever seen on Greek or Roman waters.

The average-sized canoe, however, is not more than fifteen or twenty feet long, and made to accommodate only three or four persons. In this, when the weather is fair, the Indian spends the greater part of his time, and almost makes it his home. In it he lounges idly, as does the Venetian in his gondola, and seems to take special pleasure in being carried about by the waves and the tide, and to be totally indifferent as to where he may be taken. Often he will have his children with him, and they seem to be fonder, if possible, of the water than their parents. They paddle with their little oars until they are exhausted, and then quietly lie down in the canoe and sleep as soundly as if they were in a cradle, or on the fur beds in their homes on the shore. To the native Alaskan, his canoe is everything. He has no other means of going from place to place, aside from walking, and even this, in most cases, is next to impossible. To travel over the rugged mountains or through the forests with their phenomenally dense undergrowth is a much more difficult task than can easily be imagined. There are no horses nor burros in Alaska, save the few recently taken from the United States, and the consequence is that the natives have to depend on their canoes almost entirely as their only means of locomotion. Whether they go fishing, hunting, or on trips of pleasure, their canoes are always brought into requisition, and seem to be a *sine qua non* of their existence.

The Indians also show considerable skill in weaving. The blankets woven by the Chilcats from the wool of the mountain goat and sheep are indeed marvels of ingenuity and coloring. They are far superior in every way to the best of those made by the Navajoes, about whose work so much has been said and written. The baskets, too, which they make from the inside bark of the cedar are scarcely less wonderful, whether one considers the figures worked on them, the harmony of colors displayed, or the substial character of the work itself. Many of the natives also evince marked taste and talent in the manufacture of jewelry. The curiously formed and engraved rings, bracelets and trinkets, of the Hyda Indians pecially, are curiosities of art, which sometimes even bear the stamp of genius.

And then I must mention their masks and dancing costumes. For weird, grotesque, fantastical, unsightly designs in costumes, and particularly in masks, the commonest "siwash"—the general name for Indian—exhibits an originality that would be hard to parallel anywhere else in the world. In the paraphernalia used, the dances of the Indians of the States bear no comparison with those that are frequently witnessed here in the far North.

In disposing of their dead, cremation among the Indians is the rule rather than the exception. The corpse is put on a pile of logs and consumed amid the wails and weird, lugubrious, unearthly chants of the assembled multitude. The few handfulls of ashes that remain are gathered up and put in a sack and deposited in a little box, which is placed upon a frame in any site that may be selected. Sometimes one will meet such a box, or depository, all alone, far up the side of a mountain; again it will be seen on the shore near the water's edge, and still again the boxes will be found together in large numbers. Such is the case in Sitka, where the Indians have a regular cemetery, if such it can be called.

And what do the Indians live on? it may be asked. The answer is simple: They subsist almost entirely on game and fish, the latter being emphatically their staff of life. During the summer they gather berries, which are here found in great variety and abundance; but vegetables and cereals they have none, and never make any attempt to cultivate them. Their favorite fish are the salmon and the halibut, but they seem to prefer the former—probably because it can be more readily obtained. These they prepare and dry in summer for the winter's use, and their total supply of provisions in many instances consists simply of dried salmon. As one passes through their village in summer one will see everwhere the bright red salmon drying on frames made for the purpose, and his mind naturally reverts to the exhibitions of *Chili Colorado* that are so conspicuous in parts of New and Old Mexico. As a delicacy, the oolican, or "candle fish" is much prized, It is, however, quite a rarity, and found in only a few localities. It derives its English name from the fact that it contains so much oil that on being dried it can be ignited and burnt as a candle. The oil actually exudes from it as it dries.

Are any fish stories told in Alaska? Yes; but the reality so far surpasses the fictitious in other parts of the world that if one were to state simple facts he would at once be denominated a Munchausen. In passing from the bays into the narrower channels the fish often go in such large schools and move with such velocity that some of them are actually crowded on to the shore, where they die or supply food for the various birds of prey which there abound. The Izaac Waltons there will tell you that at certain seasons of the year the fish are so abundant that one can fill a boat in a short time with a simple pitchfork. Or again, they aver that in passing up the rivers or through the narrow channels the fish crowd together so compactly that one can easily cross over on the bridge formed by such a blockade without getting his feet wet. Some of you may think this is drawing a pretty long bow; but if you have any doubts about the truth of the statement you are respectfully referred to any of the numerous anglers who have visited Alaska during the past half decade.

Living on fish, and leading the comparatively lazy lives they do, the natives have a fat, oily appearance, although taken as a class, they will compare most favorably in *physique* to any of the Indians of the South. As a rule, they are more industrious, and are always ready to work for a consideration. Indeed in the mines and fisheries they take their place beside the white man, and do as much work as the latter, and do it equally well.

They are good hunters and skilful trappers; but they engage in these pursuits not so much for the meat which they obtain as for the furs which they secure, and of which they always know the full value. One may go into almost any Indian hut and find a collection of furs; but one makes a big mistake if he thinks he can get a good skin at a nominal price. Tourists to Alaska are surprised and disappointed at finding the natives demanding as much, and more, for furs than one would be asked for them in New York or London. An Indian there, on being asked the price of a silver fox skin, will say "ten dollars," and count four, five or six fingers, meaning he wants so many times ten dollars for the skin. For an otter skin he will ask you from $80 to $140, the price depending on the quality. And there is no use in expecting a reduction of prices. All the Indians seem to have a scale of prices and an iron-clad agreement to abide by the same, and it is simply loss of time to talk about getting an article offered for sale for less than the price first demanded. A "Siwash" will row from Sitka to Juneau—a distance of nearly two hundred miles—if he thinks he can get a few more cents on one or two skins. Time and rowing seem to be no object to him, and he will keep his furs for a year or more, or transport them hundreds of miles, if there is any possibility of getting the slightest advance in price. And this is not because he is so poor, or because he rarely sees money. All the Indians have money, and some of them can count their shekels up to $5,000 or $6,000, or more. But they always take good care to keep their treasure concealed, and will not allow even any of the members of the family to know where it is kept.

The Indians of southwestern Alaska seem to be a happy and contented people, and there is no reason in the world why they should be otherwise. They can always secure an abundance of food with little or no exertion, and the climate is so temperate the year round that they never suffer from either heat or cold. They need only kill a few fur-bearing animals—and that they can do with little difficulty—and thus secure the means of buying the blankets and other articles of clothing they require, and still have money left for other purchases they may desire to make. As a rule, the Indians of this section of the country, contrary to what might be supposed, are much better provided for by bountiful nature than are any of the tribes of the United States or Mexico.

Through the efforts of the missionaries, schools and churches have been established here and there, and the natives are gradually being brought under the beneficent influences of Christianity. But here, as in the states, the missionary's greatest obstacle to success, after overcoming the diabolism of the *shamans*, or medicine men, is the white man. In Alaska, as elsewhere, promiscuous intercourse of the races has a most demoralizing effect on the natives. The Indian contracts all of the vices of the white man and acquires none of his virtues; and the only hope, apparently, of ever successfully educating and Christianizing him is to keep him isolated from those who should be his helpers, but who, in reality, are his destroyers.

Alaska belongs to the diocese of the Most Rev. Archbishop Seeghers, of Victoria, B. C., who is probably the greatest living authority on the country and its inhabitants. He has spent two years in exploring the Yukon region, and has recorded his observations in a large manuscript work, which, it is to be hoped, will soon be given to the press, as there can be no doubt that it would prove to be the most interesting and instructive work on the country yet written. His Grace is now making efforts to provide the more important posts with priests, and hopes soon to have schools in the larger towns in charge of Brothers and Sisters, or both. The field may not seem inviting, the work may appear formidable; but the charge could not be entrusted to better hands than those of the learned Archbishop who has already accomplished so much in this part of the world for the good of Education and Religion.

Whence came the people I have just been speaking of? is a question every visitor to the country asks himself, time and again. Theories by the score have been propounded, but none of them seem to give a satisfactory answer to the question. One ethnologist, basing his speculations on their carvings and hyeroglyphics, will tell you that they are the descendants of the Indians driven out of Mexico by Cortez, and who are said to have migrated to the North. Another, relying on a resemblance, real or fancied, discovered in the roots of certain words occurring in the languages spoken by the natives of the country and in those of the inhabitants of Japan and China, concludes that the Alaskans, generations ago, came in some way or other from Japan or China. Still another, comparing the manners and customs and languages of the aboriginees on either side of Behring's Straits, and keeping in mind the fact that there is at the present day constant intercourse between the inhabitants of the two continents, finds strong and seemingly conclusive reasons for believing that the Esquimaux and all the tribes of the northern portion of the American continent, came directly from Asia, by crossing the narrow channel that separates the Old from the New World. This theory certainly seems the simplest and most satisfactory, and will, I doubt not, eventually prove to be the true one.

The question of putting Alaska in telegraphic and railway communication with the rest of the world has often been discussed, and the erection of a telegraph line was actually commenced twenty years ago. The Western Union Telegraph Company spent $3,000,000 in reconnoitreing some six thousand miles of country intervening between the southwestern corner of British Columbia and the Amoor River in southeastern Siberia, with a view of connecting by wire the United States with Asia and Europe. After, however, the demonstrated success of the Atlantic cable, about which electrical engineers before had grave doubts, the matter was dropped. Still the preliminary surveys showed the feasibility of erecting the line, although it would be difficult and expensive.

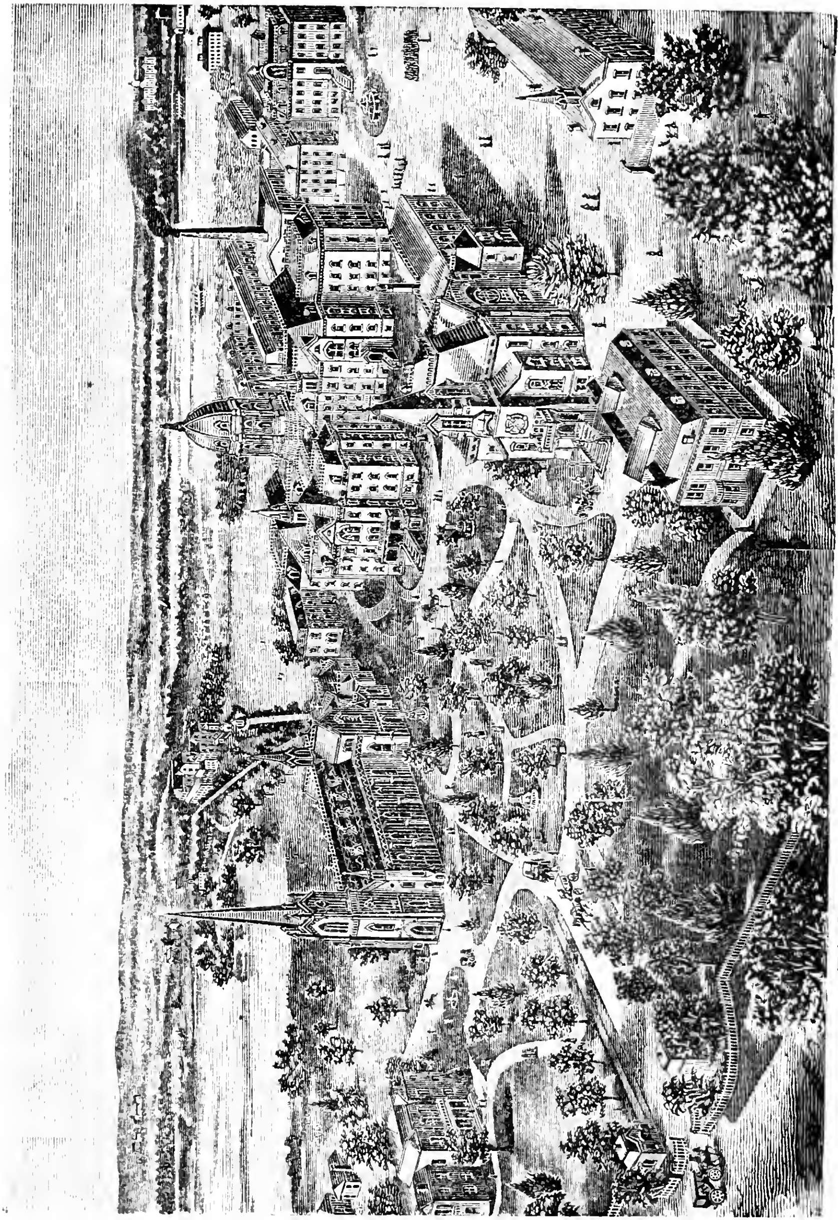
The question, too, of running a railroad from New York to St. Petersburg and London (*via* Behring's Straits) has likewise often been discussed. Now that the Canadian Pacific is completed, it would not be such a difficult matter, the advocates of the scheme maintain, to continue the road to some point on Behring's Straits—Port Clarence, for instance—which could then be connected by ferry with the Asiatic side of the Straits. The road could then be prolonged through Siberia to the Amoor River, and thence carried on to connect with the road that the Russians are now building into their Asiatic possessions. It is one of the things, say the sanguine projectors of the road, that must be done sooner or later, as the lines of the world's travel and commerce will never be complete without it.

The objection raised about the difficulty of crossing Behring's Straits on account of icebergs does not seem to have any foundation in fact, as icebergs are never known to come so far south, being prevented by the strong inflowing current from the South Pacific towards the Arctic Ocean.

Will the road ever be more than a day-dream? From what is already known of the country which it is to traverse, we cannot say that its construction would be impossible. Just now, however, there seems to be no special use for it; but if there were, and if it could be shown that it would pay good dividends, one would be safe, I think, in hazarding the prediction that the necessary capital and enterprise would not be long in forthcoming.

Ours is an age of surprises and wonders. Only a few decades ago nearly all our vast domain west of the Missouri was put down on the map as the "Great American Desert." But, thanks to the enterprise and indomitable courage of our pioneers, this has been changed. What was for a long time regarded as a useless waste has been converted into the fairest and most productive portion of our great Republic; and where, not more than a few years ago, the only signs of human habitation were the wigwams of the savages of the plains, we now find the most attractive and prosperous cities of the Union. May not a similar change be wrought in the part of the world of which I have been speaking? Who knows? In our age of steam and electricity, it is almost rash to predict anything as impossible to the genius of progress and civilization. What has been accomplished in the plains of the West, under many adverse circumstances, and what has been effected among the "Rockies" and the Sierras of the farther West, may reasonably be looked for in the distant North, where many of the difficulties which the advance guard of pioneers had to contend with elsewhere are measurably less, and where some of the conditions of ultimate success are more propitious. In view of these facts, one will be safe, I think, in predicting that, at no distant future, Alaska will be a prized gem in Columbia's crown—a conspicuous star in the bright galaxy that constitutes the United States of America.

Founded in 1842.



Bird's-Eye View of the University of Notre Dame, Ind.

Chartered in 1844.

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