

tries is still lower, being 1 to 1,406 in Saxony, and 1 to 1,429 in Denmark. Dr. Skrebetski's paper attracted a considerable amount of attention from the lay press, the *Novosti* remarking, "We have surpassed Europe not only in mental but in physical blindness." To any foreigner, however, who reads the Russian medical journals, the valuable original communications with which they literally teem would appear to indicate the reverse of 'blindness,' in the Russian scientific world at all events.

BANCROFT'S HISTORY OF ALASKA.

THE history of Alaska, up to the time of the American purchase, has two divisions into which it naturally falls,—the period of independent Russian traders, fighting and competing on every hand; and the period of organized monopoly, which succeeded that competitive anarchy. Explorations of a rude sort, the vices of the semi-civilized Cossacks, and the rage for wealth represented by sea-otter skins, went hand in hand. A myriad of petty traders, bold, energetic, lustful, and avaricious, after the return of Bering's expedition, swarmed upon the Aleutian Islands, trading, hunting and robbing the natives, occasionally being slaughtered in return.

Of this period, with the causes which led to it, and its consequences for Russia and for America, Mr. Bancroft gives an extremely full and almost interesting account. Parts of it are dramatic; but the annals of so many petty expeditions with the same object, and almost always substantially similar results, cannot but be rather monotonous. Though much of the material is of only approximate accuracy, and derived from scattered and unverifiable copies of old records long destroyed, Mr. Bancroft has given what would seem to be by far the best account extant, and one not likely to be improved upon.

Of the second period we have also a remarkably full and acceptable account of the formation, fortunes, and fate of the monopoly known as the Russian American company, and of Alexander Baranoff, the man of all others characteristic of the Russian occupation of Alaska, the Peter the Great of the territory. Of history in its widest sense, the grasp of underlying motives,—the reaction of European politics, the growth of the United States, and other large forces upon the springs which governed events on the north-west coast,—there is little: the volume is rather materials for history, than history. But it is for the Russian period a very full, and in the main

sufficiently accurate, chronicle of events. Of the period succeeding the purchase (a much more difficult task) less can be said in praise. A similar division of this epoch will by its future historian be found applicable. The era of violent and unrestrained competition in this case, however, lasted only two or three years; while the monopoly which succeeded, though more confined in scope than that of the Russian company, does not differ in its essential characters, and is still in operation. The chronicle of events since 1867 is full, but by no means complete. The scientific investigations, which have been a marked feature in the recent development of the territory, are very unequally treated, and many of them pass with a bare mention; others are ignored altogether; while a disproportionate space is given to the petty affairs of the trade-monopoly above referred to. There are numerous errors of detail; and the just reprobation of misgovernment and lawlessness, which the (mostly foreign) fur-traders under American sovereignty should share with the still viler authors of the early Russian trade, seems to have been reserved for the former in unreasonable proportion. This period, however, is so much nearer the historian, so many of the actors in it are still in the active pursuit of their business, and the passions and prejudices engendered by recent rivalry are still so hot, that historical impartiality is not to be expected.

Mr. Bancroft recognizes the wealth of the territory, and gives an excellent account of its hardly touched resources, other than the fur-trade. He very justly and severely criticises the inaction of congress, which has left the territory at the mercy of law-breakers for more than fifteen years, has only recently accorded a merely nominal and almost impotent form of government, and in the past has saddled upon the inhabitants, in lieu of the law they had a right to, a succession of corrupt or inefficient petty officials. The book has an excellent index, and numerous small sketch-maps in the text. The general map of the territory is bad, out of date, and in nomenclature discrepant with itself and with text, beside containing several inexcusable and wholly original blunders.

OCEANA.

SIR ARTHUR HELPS once said that when Lord Palmerston was forming a new ministry, not so very many years ago, he was at loss for a colonial secretary. This name and that was suggested, and thrown aside. At last the noble lord said,

History of Alaska, 1730-1885. By HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT. San Francisco, Bancroft, 1886. 8°.

Oceana; or, England and her colonies. By JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE. New York, Scribner, 1886. 8°.