SCIENCE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 1896.

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MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to the responsible editor, Prof. J. McKeen Cattell, Garrison-on-Hudson, N. Y.

ALASKA AS IT WAS AND IS, 1865–1895. *

IN 1864 the apparent hopelessness of the attempts to establish a workable trans-Atlantic telegraph cable led those interested in telegraphic communication with Europe to consider other means of attaining that end. It was thought that a short cable across Bering Strait might be made to work, and no doubt was entertained of the possibility of maintaining the enormously extended land lines which should connect the ends of this cable with the systems already in operation in Europe and the United States. A company was formed for this purpose, and an expedition to undertake the explorations necessary to determine the route was organized. The coöperation of the Russian and American governments was secured and the necessary funds subscribed. Searching for properly qualified explorers, the promoters of the enterprise consulted the Smithsonian Institution and were brought into communication with Robert Kennicott, of Chicago, a young and enthusiastic naturalist, who had already made some remarkable journeys in the Hudson Bay Territories in the interest of science. His explorations had taken him to the most remote of the Hudson Bay posts—Fort Yukon on the river of the same name—regardless of every kind of hardship,

* The annual presidential address, delivered before the Philosophical Society of Washington, December 6, 1895, by W. H. Dall.

privation and isolation. His ardor was so contagious that before returning to civilization he had communicated it to almost every one of the hard-headed fur traders in that remote and inhospitable region, and for years afterward bird skins, eggs, ethnological specimens, and collections in every branch of natural history, poured from the frozen north into the Smithsonian Museum by hundreds and thousands.

When Kennicott, after traveling for months on snow-shoes, sledges, or bateaux, stood at last on the steep bluff at Fort Yukon, he saw the yellow flood of the great river surging by the most remote outpost of civilization and disappearing to the westward in a vast and unknown region. An uninhabited gap of hundreds of miles lay between him and the nearest known native settlement to the west. Far in the north the midnight sun lighted up the snowy peaks of the Romanzoff mountains, whose further slope it was believed gave on the Polar sea. No one knew where the Yukon met the ocean. On most maps of that day a large river called the Colvile, found by Simpson on the Arctic coast as he journeyed toward Point Barrow, was indicated as the outlet of the Yukon watershed. South of the Romanzoff mountains for an unknown distance vast tundras, scantily wooded with larch and spruce, the breeding grounds of multitudes of water fowl, intersected by many streams, but level as a prairie, extended to the west.

The native population of this region, as far as known, had always been scanty, and an epidemic of scarlet fever, introduced some years before through contact with other tribes trading to the coast, had swept them absolutely out of existence. Not an individual was left, and the nomadic natives who reached Fort Yukon from the east and southeast hesitated to approach the hunting grounds, where the mysterious pestilence might linger still.

Obliged to terminate his explorations here, Kennicott returned, after months of weary travel, to the United States, but cherished the hope of some day penetrating the *terra incognita* on whose borders he had been obliged to pause and turn away. The dream of his life was thereafter the exploration of Russian America, the discovery of its fauna, and the determination of its relations to the fauna of Siberia and Japan. The group of young zoölogists which gathered about him at the Chicago Academy of Sciences, an institution of which Kennicott was practically the creator, was frequently roused to enthusiasm by impromptu lectures on the problems to be solved, the specimens to be collected, and the adventures to be anticipated in that virgin territory.

The need of the telegraph company for one familiar with life and conditions in the North brought him the long sought opportunity, and he undertook to lead the exploration, provided he was permitted to utilize it for science to the fullest extent commensurate with the attainment of the objects of the expedition. He stipulated that he should be permitted to select a party of six persons who should be qualified to make scientific observations and collections in the intervals of other work, but who should hold themselves ready to do any work required by the promoters of the enterprise, even to digging post-holes for the line if called upon.

His terms were accepted, and the scientific corps of the exposition organized and started for San Francisco. Here two of the members were detailed to join the party engaged in exploring the route through British Columbia; the others, of whom the speaker was one, accompanied Kennicott to the north.

In July, 1865, the exposition entered the bay of Sitka and our acquaintance with Russian America began.

Sitka was then a stockaded town of about 2,000 inhabitants, with a village of more than 1,500 Indians outside the walls. The settlement contained a Greek church, a Lutheran chapel, shipyards, warehouses, barracks, a clubhouse for the officers, a sawmill, a foundry where brass, copper and iron castings of moderate size were made, beside numerous dwellings. All the buildings were log structures, their outer walls washed with yellow ochre, the roofs chiefly of metal painted red. High above the rest, on an elevated rock, rose a large building, in which the governor of the Russian colonies had his residence. This, known to visitors as the 'castle,' was built of squared logs, with two stories and a cupola, and was defended by a battery. The warm colors of the buildings, above which rose the pale green spire and bulbous domes of the Greek church, seen against steep, snow-tipped mountains densely clothed with sombre forests of spruce, produced a picturesque effect unique among American settlements.

Outside the walls, along the beach, was a long row of large Indian houses, low and wide, without windows, built of immense planks painfully hewn out of single logs with stone adzes, whose marks could still be distinctly seen. They were entered by small, low doors, rounded above, so that he who came in must bend to an attitude ill suited to defense. The front of each house was painted with totemic emblems in red ochre. Their dimensions were sometimes as much as 40 by 60 feet, and the area within formed one large room, with the rafters visible overhead, the middle portion floored only with bare earth, on which the fire was built, the smoke escaping through a large square hole in the roof. On either side were raised platforms with small partitioned retreats like state rooms, each sheltering a single family. As many as one hundred people sometimes dwelt in one of these houses. The only ornaments were totemic carvings, generally against the wall opposite the entrance; overhead hung nets, lines and other personal property, drying in the smoke, along with strips of meat or fish and fir branches covered with the spawn of herring.

On the bank, which rose behind the houses, densly covered with herbage of a vivid green, were seen curious box-like tombs, often painted in gay colors or ornamented with totemic carvings or wooden effigies. These tombs sheltered the ashes of their cremated dead. On the beach in front of the houses lay numerous canoes whose graceful shape and admirable workmanship extorted praises from the earliest as well as the later explorers of the coast. When not in use these were always sheltered from the sun by branches of spruce and hemlock or tarpaulins of refuse skins. Among the canoes innumerable wolfish dogs snarled, fought, or played the scavenger.

The natives still retained to some extent their original style of dress, modified now and then by a Russian kerchief or a woolen shirt. As a rule they were barefooted, stolid, sturdy, uncompromising savages, who looked upon the white man with a defiance but slightly tempered with fear and a desire to trade. The mission church of that day was built into the stockade, with doors entering it both from the Indian and Russian town. When services were held, the outer door was opened, the town door closed and stoutly barred. Once these fierce clansmen had endeavored to rush into and take the settlement when the door leading inward had been left unfastened. From the time when the first white men to touch these shores, Chirikoff's boat's crew in 1741, were without provocation massacred, these natives had not failed to maintain their reputation for courage, greed, treachery and intelligence.

These conditions outside the settlement necessitated a military discipline within it.

Sentries regularly paced the walks by day and night, the sullen Indians were systematically watched, and the little batteries kept in readiness for use.

The needs of the business of the company made Sitka a lively manufacturing town, in spite of the multitudinous Russian holidays. Society there was like a bit of old Russia, with the manners, vices and sturdy qualities of sailor, peasant and courtier fully exemplified within its narrow limits. A fishery at Deep Lake, a few miles away, furnished fresh salmon in abundance, which was freely distributed to all comers, twice or thrice a week during the season. The company furnished each employee with certain stated rations of flour, sugar, tea, etc., at fixed prices; the harbor, within a few yards of the stockade, contained abundance of seafish, and the Indians' price for a deer, skinned and dressed, was a silver dollar or a glass of vodka. The primeval forest came close to the town; the demand for firewood and timber had made little impression upon it. White settlements in the Alexander archipelago were confined to a few small fortified trading posts. Fort Wrangell and Fort Tongass alone could be regarded as approximately permanent. The parties sent out to trade or hunt worked from a temporary camp or an armed vessel as a base, and, owing to the ill feeling which existed between the natives and Russians, smuggling and illicit trading were rife. Missionary effort did not exist outside of Sitka, and even there amounted to little more than the bribery of some greedy savage, to perform for a consideration some rites which he did not understand.

The law of Russia which prevented a permanent severance of a subject from his native soil (except for crime) operated to encourage temporary unions of the company's servants with native women. Marriages were not allowed between full-blooded Russians and natives, as, at the expiration of his term of service, the Russian must return to his own parish in Russia, and the native could not be carried away from the place of her nativity. After the transfer of Alaska to the United States many of these Russians elected to remain in the country and were married to the mothers of their children; but at the time of our first visit, the most surprising social fact to us was the perfect equality which appeared to subsist between these irregular partners and the married women who had come from Russia. So far as we could perceive, both classes behaved with equal propriety and were treated with equal respect by the community, and the only restriction which the authorities insisted upon was that no Russian should take to himself a partner who had not been duly baptized. The issue of these unions, being of Alaskan birth, were free to marry in the country, and with their descendants constituted the class to which the Russians gave the name of 'Creoles.' Some of them rose to eminence in the service, and one at least became governor of the colonies.

At the time of our visit the business of the colony was exclusively the development of the fur trade. Agriculture was confined to a trifling amount of gardening very imperfectly performed. The fisheries were utilized only to supply food for the people in the company's employ, or to insure subsistence for the natives whose time was devoted to hunting the sea otter or preparing skins for the authorities. The fur trade of southeastern Alaska was not very productive. The natives were disposed to trade with the Hudson Bay Company or illicit traders rather than with the Russians, partly because they obtained better prices for their skins and partly because the Russians refused to trade intoxicating liquors, while the outsiders were not troubled with any scruples in such matters. The furs were divided by the Russians into two

classes—the precious furs, such as the fox, sea otter and sable, which were strictly reserved for the company, a certain proportion being imperial perquisites of the Russian court, and the cheaper sorts, which might be used by the company's employees for winter clothing, and were sold at a fixed price to them for this purpose. This included the muskrat, mink, Parry's marmot or ivrashka, the fur seal and some others. Dry skins of the fur seal were sold at the company's warehouse for 12½ cents apiece, the modern plucking and dyeing of the fur, invented by an American, Raymond, of Albany, not having reached a perfection sufficient to attract the fashionable world.

The European trading goods and supplies were mainly brought by ship from Hamburg, the same vessel taking the annual load of skins to China, where an exchange was made for tea and silk, which were carried back to Europe. Flour was imported latterly from California and some goods were brought from Aian and other ports on the Okhotsk sea in the earlier days of the business, but in 1865 this trade had come to a standstill or nearly so. In mineral resources almost nothing was done; a little coal was taken out at Cook's inlet for local uses, and the exportation of ice from Kadiak to California was carried on under a lease by an American company. The presence of gold, iron and graphite was known to the authorities, but prospecting was not encouraged, as it was supposed the development of mineral resources might react unfavorably on the fur trade.

The first codfisherman visited the Shumagin Islands in 1865. The whale fishery was wholly in the hands of Americans and other foreigners, uncontrolled by the Russians, and the timber was used only for local purposes.

The main business of the company was done at its continental trading posts in the northern part of the territory and in the Aleutian chain; its authority in the territory was as absolute as the presence of the uncivilized tribes would admit. Under the guns of the trading posts the company was master; out of their range every man was a law unto himself.

After transacting its business at Sitka, the expedition touched at the island of Unga to examine a coal mine, at Unalashka, the Pribiloff Islands, and at Saint Michael's, Norton Sound, where Kennicott and the explorers for the Yukon were landed. The speaker was put in charge of the scientific work of the expedition and remained with the fleet, visiting Bering Strait, where landing places for the cable were searched for; and Petropavlovsk, the capital of Kamchatka, where the Siberian parties were provided for; and then the vessels returned to San Francisco.

The following year, on returning to Saint Michael's, we were met by the news of Kennicott's death from heart disease, brought on by over-exertion and anxiety. The Yukon exploration was still incomplete, though information received made it certain that the Kwikhpak of the Russians and the Yukon and Pelly of the English were one and the same river. It remained to emphasize this information by a continuous exploration which should cover the unmapped portion of this mighty stream. The scientific work in zoölogy projected by Kennicott had been left by his premature death unrealized. The speaker determined to carry out these plans and was authorized to remain in the country for that purpose.

As soon as sufficient snow had fallen to render sledging practicable a portage from Norton sound to the Yukon river was traversed, a small boat transported on a sledge for use during the following summer, and the Yukon ascended on the ice to the trading post at Nulato, a distance of some three hundred miles. Here the party of five wintered and in March divided into two

parts—one, under Frank Ketchum, taking sledges with the intention of traversing the unknown region on the ice and after reaching Fort Yukon to ascend further in canoes; the other to await the break-up of the ice in May and follow in the skin canoe, so as to rescue the first party should they have failed to carry out their plans. Both projects were successfully carried out and the two parties reunited at Fort Yukon on the 29th of June, 1867. They returned by the whole length of the river and reached Saint Michael's on the 25th of July. Here astonishing news awaited us: The Atlantic cable was a triumphant success, the United States were in negotiation for the purchase of Russian America, our costly enterprise was abandoned, and all hands were to take ship for California.

The collections and observations had been but half completed. The natural history of the Upper Yukon and the borders of Norton sound had been pretty well examined, but the vast delta of the Yukon, with its wonderful fauna of fishes and water birds, its almost unknown native tribes and geographic features, remained practically untouched. I immediately determined to remain and devote the following year to the unfinished work. An arrangement with the Russians was made and this plan carried out. In the autumn of 1868 I left Norton sound for California on a trading vessel and returned to civilization.

At the time our explorations of the Yukon began this immense region was occupied by two or three thousand Indians, many of whom had never seen a white man. The Russian establishments on the Yukon were only three in number, hundreds of miles apart, and chiefly manned by Creole servants of the company, not over a dozen at each post. An inefficient priest, with a few alleged converts, conducted as a mission of the Greek Church the only religious establishment in the whole Yukon valley. The industries of the region comprised trapping, hunting and fishing; the first for revenue, the others for subsistence. The means of navigation were birch-bark canoes and small skin-boats. Once a year the clumsy barkass of the Russians, loaded with tea, flour and trading goods, was laboriously forced upstream to the Nulato post, returning with a load of furs. The tribes of Eskimo extraction occupied the lower river banks from the sea to the Shageluk slough, above which they were replaced by Indians of the Tinneh stock. These were to be found in scattered villages at various points on the river or its tributaries, where the abundance of fish offered means of subsistence. The extreme limit of population was to be found at the junction with the Yukon of the large river Tananá, where the island of Nūklūkayét was recognized as neutral ground, where delegations from all the tribes met in the spring for their annual market of furs. Here our party had the interesting experience of meeting the delegation of Tananá Indians in full native costume of pointed shirts and trousers of dressed deer skin adorned with black and white beads, the nasal septum pierced to carry an ornament of dentalium shell, their long hair formed into a bundle of locks, stiff with tallow, wound with beads, dusted with powdered hematite and the chopped down of swans. The ranks of frail birch canoes were accurately aligned, and their paddles rose and fell with military precision. When they rounded the point of the island and approached the beach, where stood the first white men they had ever seen, they were met by a complimentary salvo from the guns of the Indians already on shore, and responded by wild yells and graceful waving of their paddles.

The waters of the Tananá had never known an explorer and its geography was wholly unknown. Never again will it be possible for an ethnologist to see upon the

Yukon such a body of absolutely primitive Indians untarnished by the least breath of civilization.

Above Nūklūkayet the Yukon enters a cañon, known as the Lower Ramparts, above which the depopulated area already alluded to extends to the site of Fort Yukon, near the British boundary on the Arctic circle.

The noble stream I have described extends, including windings, about 1,600 miles from Fort Yukon to the sea. The valley is sometimes wide and low, sometimes narrow, and contracted by low, wooded mountains. Everywhere until the delta is approached the banks are wooded. There are many tributaries, none of which were then explored, and on either side of the main artery the land stretched unexplored for hundreds of miles. Not another person speaking any European tongue, except the Russian, was resident in all this territory during the second year of my sojourn. Outside of the three trading posts, not a native had ever bought a pound of flour or an ounce of tea. The use of woolen clothing had hardly begun, and soap was a rare and costly luxury. I made the first candles ever molded on the Yukon, and but for the lack of hardwood ashes to furnish alkali would have tried my hand at soap. People lived on game and fish. The caribou was plentiful in the absence of rifles; the moose was not yet exterminated; the warm days of spring brought incalculable multitudes of ducks and geese, to say nothing of other water fowl; the Arctic rabbit and the ptarmigan were a constant resource, and the rivers and lakes in many places teemed with fish. Clothing was made of deerskin and sewed with sinew; the ornaments were fringes from the gray wolf or wolverine. Undergarments were occasionally made of cotton bought from the traders, but more usually from the skins of fawns. At one village during the season for taking them I saw 4,300 fawn skins hanging up to dry. Such reckless destruction has since borne its natural fruit. It was only at certain localities even then that deer were plentiful. The main staple of subsistence was fish. During the summer the river was studded with traps for salmon; in winter the traps were set in the ice, and under favorable conditions furnished a steady supply of white-fish, burbot, pike, grayling and the great red sucker. The salmon were cleaned, split into three parts connected at the tail, and dried in the open air by millions; they furnished food for man and dog, and when well cured were not unpalatable. Vegetable food was almost unknown, except in the form of berries. The green flower stalks of *Rumex* and *Archangelica* were occasionally eaten, and the dwellers by the sea sometimes gathered dulse, but for practical purposes the diet was meat and fish.

It was known that gold existed in the sands of the river, but the inexperienced fur traders looked for it in the bars of the main river and not in the side cañons of small streams, where it has since been found in such abundance. The real riches of the Yukon valley then lay in its furs. In a garret at Fort Yukon the post trader showed me with pardonable pride 300 silver fox skins of the first quality. Beautiful in themselves and for what they represented —gold, praises, and promotion in the service—one might almost forget that some of the company's servants at this post had not tasted bread or butter, sugar or tea for seven long years.

The region of the delta was, and is still, remarkable as being the breeding place of myriads of water fowl, some of which are peculiar to the Alaskan region. Nearly one hundred species gather there, and one of them comes all the way from North Australia, by the coasts of China and Japan, to lay its eggs and rear its young in the Yukon delta. It is also remarkable for the abun-

dance of the great king salmon, sometimes reaching a weight of 130 pounds, a fish less plentiful further up and which does not ascend to the headwaters of the river.

All this immense Territory has since been penetrated by traders and prospectors. Stern-wheel steamers have defied the current, and ply regularly on the river during the season of open water. Mission schools are numerous and reindeer scarce. The fur trade wanes, while many thousands of dollars in gold dust have been laboriously extracted from the gravels. The natives buy tea and flour and dress in woolen clothing. With the miners whisky has reached the wilderness, and the sound of the American language is heard in the land. Tame reindeer have been imported from Siberia with a view to their domestication by the Eskimo of the Arctic coast, who are on the verge of starvation at frequent intervals, owing to the destruction of their food supply by the whalers and walrus hunters and the introduction of Winchester rifles for killing the wild deer. With the alternative of starvation as a stimulus, the chances of success ought to be good.

In carrying out the plans which Kennicott had meditated, but which death had stayed, I had succeeded in gathering rather abundant material for my friends, the ornithologists, botanists, ethnologists, and so on, but to do it I had to put aside the work in the department in which I personally was most interested. The shores of Norton sound and the tundra of the Yukon valley offered little in the way of mollusks or other invertebrates. The desire to extend our knowledge of the geographical distribution of the sea fauna led me to propose a further exploration of the coasts of the Territory, especially of the Aleutian chain, under the auspices of the United States Coast Survey. A geographical reconnaissance was undertaken and carried on during five years, investigating magnetism and hydrology, making charts, tidal observations, meteorological and hypsometric notes. In all this I was ably seconded by my companions, Mark W. Harrington and Marcus Baker, who need no introduction to this audience. At the same time, and without interfering with the regular work, the dredge was kept constantly busy, and on my return from field work the material for the studies I had so long looked forward to was actually gathered.

The region which includes the Aleutian chain and other islands west of Kadiak presents a striking contrast to the densely wooded mountains and shining glaciers of the Sitkan region to the east and the rolling tundra cut by myriad rivers in the North. Approached by sea, the Aleutian islands seem gloomy and inhospitable. Omnipresent fog wreaths hang about steep cliffs of dark volcanic rock. An angry surf vibrates to and fro amid outstanding pinnacles, where innumerable sea birds wheel and cry. The angular hills and long slopes of talus are not softened by any arborescent veil. The infrequent villages nestle behind sheltering bluffs, and are rarely visible from without the harbors. In winter all the heights are wrapped in snow, and storms of terrific violence drive commerce from the sea about them.

Once pass within the harbors during summer and the repellent features of the landscape seem to vanish. The mountain sides are clothed with soft yet vivid green and brilliant with many flowers. The perfume of the spring blossoms is often heavy on the air. The lowlands are shoulder high with herbage, and the total absence of trees gives to the landscape an individuality all its own. No more fascinating prospect do I know than a view of the harbor of Unalashka from a hilltop on a sunny day, with the curiously irregular, verdant islands set in a sea of celestial blue, the shorelines marked by creamy surf, the ravines by

brooks and waterfalls, the occasional depressions by small lakes shining in the sun.

The sea abounds with fish; the offshore rocks are the resort of sea lions and formerly of sea otters; the streams afford the trout fisher abundant sport, and about their mouths the red salmon leap and play. In October the hillsides offer store of berries, and in all this land there is not a poisonous reptile or dangerous wild animal of any sort.

The inhabitants of these islands are an interesting and peculiar race. Their characteristics have been well described by Veniaminoff, who knew and loved them. By the testimony of their language, physique and culture they are shown to be a branch of the Eskimo stock, driven from the continent, as the shell heaps reveal, at a very ancient date and isolated since from contact with any other native race, specialized and developed by their peculiar environment to a remarkable degree. Conquered by the Russian hunters of the eighteenth century, practically enslaved for a century, their ancient religion frankly abandoned for the rites of the Greek Church, an apathetic reticence replaced the rollicking good nature characteristic of the Eskimo people. In 1865 they were supported by the company; the men shipped off in hunting parties in search of the sea otter were separated from their families sometimes for many months and rewarded according to their success; but, while the company provided food for all who needed it, the time of the Aleut was not his own. I have already mentioned that the fur seal at that time had very little commercial value. The fishery on the Pribiloff Islands was conducted by Aleuts under supervision, and the skins were mostly shipped to China or Europe. It has been noted as surprising that the value of the fur-seal fishery is so little referred to in the arguments urging the acquisition of the Territory in 1867. This was not an oversight; the seal fisheries at that time were not especially lucrative, and the millions which the industry has since produced could not have been predicted in 1867.

(*To be continued.*)

*A SIMPLEX SPECTROSCOPE.**

FOR the purpose of explaining the construction and operation of the spectroscope to beginners, the simplest form was desired and after various modifications of the usual form had been constructed, the following arrangement was devised and has proved eminently satisfactory, No lenses are required and only a small prism of fair quality.

The apparatus is shown in perspective in Fig. 1†. P is the small prism, about 1.5 cm. on a side and 60° refracting angle. B is an ordinary Bunsen burner with chimney. AC is a metal screen, supported upon a stand, and having a rectangular opening in its center covered by a scale in millimeters upon translucent paper or celluloid, covered upon the back with mica to protect it from the burner. Under the center of the scale is a triangular opening about 8 mm. high and 5 mm. wide at its base. The plan of the location of the parts is shown in Fig 2. The scale AC is about 50 cm. from the prism.

The operation of the spectroscope is as follows: The light from the burner B, passing through the opening D, falls upon the prism P and is refracted into the eye placed somewhere at E, and the light appears to come from a direction similar to D′ E. The scale is illuminated with a strong sodium light, obtained either by placing a 'sodium chimney' on the burner B, or by putting a sodium bead in the top of the flame. The scale being seen only by sodium light appears clear and distinct in

* Unpublished paper by Holbrook Cushman; edited by W. Hallock. See SCIENCE, December 6, 1895, p. 757.

† See SCIENCE, December 6, 1895, note on p. 761.