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# ALASKA-LAND.

## A Perilous Adventure--Shooting the Rapids.

### A Typical Young Yosemite — Royal Glaciers—Alaska Flora.

[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLETIN.]

GOLD CAMP, SUM DUM BAY, }  
ALASKA, August 20, 1880. }

The song of our sixteen cascades made us sleep all the sounder last night, and we were so happy as to find this morning that the bergs and berg-waves had spared our canoe, and that our way down the fiord was comparatively open. Sliding ourselves and baggage down the rocks we set off in high spirits down the fiord and across to the right side to explore a remarkably deep and narrow branch of the main fiord that I had noted on the way up, and that, from the magnitude of the glacial character of its advertisement on the two colossal rocks that guard the entrance, promised a rich reward for our pains.

After we had sailed about three miles up this narrow side fiord we came to what seemed to be the head of it, for trees and rocks swept in a curve around from one side to the other without showing any opening, although the walls of the canyon were seen extending back indefinitely, one majestic brow beyond the other, into the alps.

In tracing this curve, however, in a leisurely way, in search of a good landing, we were startled by Captain Tyeen shouting "Skookum chuck! Skookum chuck!" (strong water, strong water) and found our canoe being carried sideways by a powerful current, the roar of which we had mistaken for that of a big waterfall. We barely escaped being swept over a rocky bar on the boiling, foaming flood, which, as we afterwards learned, would have been only a happy push on our way. After we had effected a landing we climbed the highest rock near the shore to seek a view of the channel beyond the rapids, to find out whether or no we could safely venture in. Up, over rolling, mossy, bushy, burnished rock waves we dragged and scrambled for an hour or two, which resulted in a fair view of the deep blue waters of the fiord stretching on and on along the feet of the most majestic Yosemite rocks we had yet seen. This determined our plan of shooting the rapids and exploring it to its farthest recesses. This novel interruption of the channel is caused by a bar of exceedingly hard granite, over which the great glacier that once occupied it swept, without degrading it to the general level, and over which the tide-waters now rush in and out with the violence of a mountain torrent in the spring time, when the snow is melting.

#### DANGEROUS CANOEING.

Returning to the canoe, we pushed off, and in a few moments were racing over the bar with lightning speed through leaping waves, and swirling eddies, and sheets of rock-dashed foam; our little shell of a boat tossed and twirled as lightly as a bubble. Then rowing across a belt of back-flowing water, we found ourselves gliding calmly along a smooth mirror reach between granite walls of the very wildest and most exciting description conceivable. Altogether, there is nothing in the far-famed Yosemite Valley that will compare with it in impressive, awe-inspiring grandeur.

#### A MAJESTIC GORGE.

As we drifted silent and awe-stricken beneath the shadows of the mighty walls which, in their tremendous height and abruptness seemed to overhang at the top, the Indians gazing intently, as if they, too, were impressed with the strange grandeur that shut them in, at length broke silence by saying, "This must be a fine place for woodchucks." When I asked them, further on, how this gorge was made, they gave up the question, but offered an opinion as to the formation of rain and soil. The rain, they said, was produced by the rapid whirling of the earth by a stout mythical being called Yek. The water of the ocean was thus thrown off, to descend again in showers, just as it is thrown off a wet grindstone. They did not, however, understand why the ocean water should be salt, while the rain from it is fresh. The soil, they said, for the plants to grow on is formed by the washing of the rain on the rocks and gradually accumulating. The grinding action of ice in this connection they had not recognized.

Gliding on and on, the scenery seemed at every turn to become more lavishly fruitful in forms as well as more sublime in dimensions. Snowy falls booming and blooming in splendid dress, colossal domes and battlements, and sculptured arches of a fine neutral gray tint, all laved by the deep blue water; green ferny dells, bits of flower bloom on ledges, fringes of willow and birch, and glaciers above all. But when we approached the base of a majestic rock, like the Yosemite Half-Dome, standing at the head of the fiord where two short branches put out, and came in sight of another grand glacier of the first order, sending off bergs, our joy was complete. I had a most glorious view of it. Sweeping in grand ease and majesty from the deep inaccessible mountains where its fountains are laid, swaying around one mighty bastion after another, until at length it falls into the fiord in shattered overleaning fragments, which, when set free, become bergs, and so waste again to water, and die in the sea. When we had feasted awhile on this un hoped-for treasure, I directed the Indians to pull to the head of the left fork of the fiord, where we found a large cascade, with a

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#### A YOUNG YOSEMITE.

This is in form and origin a typical Yosemite Valley, though as yet its floor is covered with ice and water—ice above and beneath. How noble a mansion in which to spend a winter and a summer! It is about ten miles long, and from three-quarters of a mile to one mile wide. It contains ten large falls and cascades, the finest one on the left side near the head. After coming in an admirable rush over a granite brow where it is first seen at a height of 900 or 1,000 feet, it leaps a sheer precipice of about 250 feet, then divides and reaches the tide-water in broken rapids over boulders. Another about 1,000 feet high drops at once on to the margin of the glacier two miles back from the snout. Several of the others are upwards of 3,000 feet high, descending through narrow gorges as richly feathered with ferns as any channel that water ever flowed in, though tremendously abrupt and deep. A grander array of rocks and waterfalls I have never yet beheld.

The amount of timber on the walls is about the same as that on the Yosemite walls, but owing to greater moisture there is more small vegetation—bushes, mosses, grasses, etc.; though by far the greater portion of the area of the wall surface is bare, and shining with the polish it received when occupied by the glacier that formed the entire cañon. The deep-green patches seen on the mountains back of the walls at the limit of vegetation are grass, where the wild goats, or chamois rather, roam and feed. The still greener and more luxuriant patches farther down in gullies and slopes where the declivity is not excessive, are made up mostly of willows, birch and huckleberry bushes, with a varying amount of prickly ribes, and rubus, and echinopanax. This growth when approached, especially on the lower slopes near the level of the sea at the jaws of the great side cañons, is found to be the most impenetrable and tedious and toilsome combination of fighting bushes that the weary explorer ever fell into, incomparably more punishing than the buckthorn and manzanita tangles of the Sierra.

#### CLIFF GARDENS.

The cliff gardens of this hidden Yosemite are exceedingly rich and beautiful. On almost every rift and bench, however small, as well as on the wider table-rocks where a little soil had lodged, we find companies of fine bright flowers, always fresh, and also far more brilliantly colored than would be looked for in so cool and beclouded a region—larkspurs, geraniums, painted-cups, blue-bells, gentians, sedums, saxifrages, epilobiums, violets, parnassia, veratrum, orchids, fritilaria, smilax, spiranthes, asters, daisies, the yellow pond lily, bryanthus, cassiope, linnea, and a great variety of flowering ribes and rubus and heathworts. Many of the above, though with soft bush stems and leaves are yet as brightly painted as those of the warm sunlands of the south. The heathworts in particular, are very abundant and beautiful, both in flower and fruit, making delicate green carpets for the rocks, flushed with pink bells, or dotted with red and blue berries. The grasses are everywhere tall, with ribbon leaves well tempered and arched, and with no lack of bristly spikes, and nodding purple panicles. The Alpine grasses of the Sierra, making close carpets on the glacier meadows, I have not yet seen in Alaska.

The ferns are less numerous in species than in California, but about equal in the number of fronds. I have seen three *Aspidiums*, two *Woodsias*, a *Lomaria*, *Polypodium*, *Cheilanthes* and a *Pteris*.

In the great left or eastern arm of this Sum Dum Bay and its Yosemite branch, I counted from the canoe, on my way up and down, 30 small glaciers above and back of the walls, and, as we have seen, three of the first order, also 37 cascades and falls, counting only those large enough to make themselves heard four or five miles. The whole bay, with its rocks and woods and ice, reverberates with their roar. How many glaciers may be disclosed in the other great arm that I have not seen as yet, I cannot say, but I guess not less than a hundred pour their turbid streams into the fiord, making about as many joyful, bouncing cataracts.

About noon we began to retrace our way back into the main fiord, and arrived here at the Gold mine camp after dark, rich and weary.

JOHN MUIR.