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At St. Paul. The Fur Seals of the Pribilof Group-
Habits of the Natives-The Annual Catch of Fur
Seals-Physical Appearance of the Islands. St. Paul,
Alaska, May 23, 1881.

John Muir

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Loss of a Rudder—An Arctic Gale—Outfitting a Land Expedition.

Intercourse with the Natives—Some Traits of Esquimo Character.

Physical Features of the Siberian Coast.

[Text continues...]

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Aleetian Islands and around the shores of Vancouver Island and the outermost of the Alexander Archipelago. No one knows certainly whence they come or whether they go. But inasmuch as they make their appearance every year about the shores of the Aleetian Islands shortly after their disappearance from St. Paul and St. George, and then later to the southward toward the coast of British Columbia, it is supposed that they are the same animals, and that they thus make journeys every year of a thousand miles or more, and return to their birthplaces like schools of salmon. They begin to appear on the breeding grounds about the first of June. These are old males, who at once take up their stations on the high ground a short distance from the shore, and keep possession of their places while they await the coming of the pregnant females who arrive about a month later, accompanied by the younger members of the community. At the height of the season the ground is closely covered with them, and they seldom go back into the water or take any food until the young are well grown and all are ready to leave the islands in the fall.

THE FUR SEAL CATCH.

In addition to the 100,000 taken here, the Company obtain about 40,000 by purchase from the Russians at Behring and Copper Islands, and from Indians and traders at different points south as far as Oregon. These skins are said to be worth about $15 apiece in the London market, to which they are all sent. The government revenue derived from the 100,000 killed each year, is $317,000. Next in importance among the fur animals of Alaska, is the Sea Otter, of which about 6,000 a year are taken, worth from eighty to one hundred dollars apiece.

APPEARANCE OF THE Pribilof Islands.

As seen from the sea all the Pribilof Islands—St. Paul, St. George and Otter Island—appear as mere rocks, naked and desolate fragments of lava, wasted into bluffs where they touch the sea, and born off on top by the ice-sheet, the grey surfaces roughened here and there by what, at a distance, seem to be degraded volcanic cones. Nevertheless, they are exceedingly interesting, not alone because of the marvelous abundance of life about them—seals, water-birds and fishes—but because they tell so grand a story concerning the ice-sheet that swept over them all from the north.

JOHN MUIR.