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ALASKA GLACIERS.

GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE YOSEMITE OF THE FAR NORTHWEST—A LIVING, MOVING GLACIER IN ALL ITS SUBLIMITY AND CRANEUR.

[CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLY.]

FORT WRANGEL, Alaska Ter., Sept. 7, 1879.

On the second morning of our broken-backed Chilcat excursion, everybody seemed cudy and conscience-stricken, and ready to do any deed of redemption whatever, provided only that it would not cost much. It was not four difficult, therefore, to convince our repentant Captain and company that instead of creeping back to Wrangel direct we should make an expiatory branch-excursion to the largest of the three great glaciers noticed in my last letter. We had an Indian pilot aboard well acquainted with this portion of the coast, who, on hearing our wishes declared himself willing to guide the new enterprise. The water in these channels is generally deep and safe, and though roches montonees rise abruptly here and there at wide intervals, lacking only a few feet in height to enable them to take rank as islands, the flat-bottomed *Cassiar* draws but little more water than a duck, so that even the most timid raised no objection on this score. The cylinder-heads of our own mysterious engines appeared to be the main source of danger to our devout company. Provided only they could be kept on, all might yet be well. But in this matter there was evidently some distrust of Providence; the engineer having imprudently informed some of the ladies that in consequence of using salt water in his frothing boilers, those iron heads might fly off at any moment, carrying softer heads with them. To the glacier, however, it was at length decided we should go.

Arriving opposite the mouth of the fiord into which it flows we steered straight inland between wooded shores surpassingly beautiful, and the grand glacier came in sight, lying at home in its massive granite valley, glowing in the early sunshine, and extending a most noble invitation to come and see. After we were fairly between the two majestic mountain rocks that guard the gate of the fiord, the view that was unfolded fixed every eye in wondering admiration. No written words, however builded together, can convey anything like an adequate conception of its sublime grandeur—the noble simplicity and the fineness of the sculpture of the walls; their magnificent proportions, their cascade, garden, and forest adornments; the placid water between them; the great white icewall stretching across in the middle, and the snow-laden mountain peaks beyond. Still more impotent are words in telling the peculiar awe one experiences in entering these virgin mansions of the icy north, notwithstanding it is only the perfectly natural effect of simple and appreciable manifestations of the presence of God.

THE FUTURE YOSEMITE OF ALASKA.

Standing in the gateway of this glorious temple, and regarding it only as a picture, its outlines may easily be traced. There is the water foreground of a pale, milky-blue color, from the suspended rock-mud issuing from beneath the grinding glacier—one smooth sheet sweeping back five or six miles like one of the lower reaches of a great river. At the head the water is bounded by a barrier wall of bluish-white ice, from five to six hundred feet high, a few mountain tops crowned with snow appearing beyond it. On either hand stretches a series of majestic granite rocks from three to four thousand feet high, in some places bare, in some forested, and all well patched with yellow-green chaparral and flowery gardens, especially about half-way up from top to bottom, and the whole built together in a general, varied way into walls, like those of Yosemite Valley, extending far beyond the ice-barrier, one immense brow appearing beyond the other, while their bases are buried in the glacier. This is, in fact, a Yosemite Valley in process of formation, the modeling and sculpture of the walls nearly completed and well planted, but no groves as yet, or gardens, or meadows, on the raw and unfinished bottom. It is as if the explorer, in entering the Merced Yosemite, should find the

walls nearly in their present condition, trees and flowers in the warm nooks and along the sunny portions of the moraine-covered brows, but the bottom of the valley still covered with water and beds of gravel and mud, and the grand trunk glacier that formed it, slowly melting and receding, but still filling the upper half, its jagged snout extending all the way across from the Three Brothers to a point below the Sentinel.

Sailing directly up to the sunken brow of the terminal moraine, we then seemed to be separated from the glacier only by a low, tide-leveled strip of detritus, a hundred yards or so in width; but on so grand a scale are all the magnitudes of the main features of the valley that we afterwards found it to be a mile or more.

A TRIP TO THE GLACIER.

The Captain ordered the Indians to get out the canoe and take as many of us ashore as wished to go, and accompany us to the glacier also, in case we should desire them to do so. Only three of the company, in the first place, availed themselves of this rare opportunity of meeting a grand glacier in the flesh—the Missionary, one of the doctors, and myself. Paddling to the nearest and dryest looking portion of the moraine, we stepped ashore, but gladly wallowed back into the canoe; for the gray mineral mud, a paste made from fine mountain meal, and kept unstable by the tides, at once took us in, swallowing us feet foremost with becoming glacial deliberation. Our next attempt, made nearer the middle of the valley, was successful, and we soon found ourselves on good gravelly ground. I made haste in a direct line for the huge icewall, which seemed to recede as we approached. The only difficulty we met was a network of icy streams, at the largest of which we halted, not willing to get wet in fording. The Indian we had elected to go along with us promptly carried us over the difficulty on his back. When my turn came I told him I would ford, but he bowed his shoulders in so ludicrously persuasive a manner I thought I would try the queer mount, the only one of the kind I had enjoyed since game-day boyhood. Away staggered my perpendicular mule over the boulders and cobblestones into the brawling torrent. The sensations experienced were most novel and most unstable, but in spite of a dozen top-heavy predictions to the contrary, we crossed without a fall.

At length, after being ferried in this way over several more of these outrushing glacial streams, we reached the glorious crystal wall, along which we passed, admiring its noble architecture, the play of light in the rifts and angles, and the structure of the ice as displayed in the less fractured sections, etc., finding fresh beauty and facts for study at every step. The Doctor soon left us to return to the boat, taking the Indian with him for portage purposes, while the Missionary and I, by dint of patient zig-zaging and doubling among the crevices and a vigorous use of our ax in cutting steps on the slopes and cliffs, made our way up over the snow and back a mile or so over the cascading brow to a height of about seven hundred feet above the base of the wall. Here we obtained a glorious view.

"A THING OF BEAUTY."

The whole front and brow of this majestic glacier is gashed and sculptured into a maze of yawning chasms and crevasses, and a bewildering variety of strange architectural forms, appalling to the strongest nerves, but novel and beautiful beyond measure—clusters of glittering lance-tipped spires, gables and obelisks, bold outstanding bastions and plain mural cliffs, adorned along the top with fretted cornice and battlement, while every gorge and crevasse, chasm and hollow was filled with light, shimmering and pulsing in pale blue tones of ineffable tenderness and loveliness. The day was warm, and back on the broad waving bosom of the glacier water-streams were outspread in a complicated network, each in its own frictionless channel cut down through the porous decaying ice of the surface into the quick and living blue, and flowing with a grace of motion and a ring and gurgle and flashing of light to be found only on the crystal hills and dales of a glacier.

Along the sides we could see the mighty flood grinding against the granite with tremendous pressure, rounding the outswelling bosses, deepening and smoothing the retreating hollows, and shaping every portion of the mountain walls into the forms they were meant to have, when, in the fullness of appointed time the ice-tool should be lifted and set aside by the sun. Every feature glowed with intention, reflecting the earth-plans of God. Back two or three miles from the front the current is now probably about twelve hundred feet deep; but when we examine the walls, the grooved and rounded features, so surely glacial, show that in the earlier days of the ice-age they were all overswept, this glacier having flowed at a height of from three to four thousand feet above its present level.

STILL THE MORNING OF CREATION.

Standing here, with facts so fresh and telling and held up so vividly before us, every seeing observer, not to say geologist, must readily apprehend the earth-sculpturing, landscape-making action of flowing ice. And here, too, one easily learns that the world, though made, is yet being made. That this is still the morning of creation. That mountains, long conceived, are now being born, brought to light by the glaciers, channels traced for rivers, basins hollowed for lakes. That moraine soil is being ground and outspread for coming plants—coarse boulders and gravel for the forests—finer meal for grasses and flow-

ers, while the finest, water-bolted portion of the grist, seen hastening far out to sea, is being stored away in the darkness, and builded, particle on particle, cementing and crystallizing, to make the mountains and valleys and plains of other landscapes, which, like fluent, pulsing water, rise and fall, and pass on through the ages in endless rhythm and beauty.

We would gladly have remained on this rugged, living, savage old mill of God, and watched its work; but we had no bread, and the *Cassiar* was screaming nervously for our return. Therefore, threading our way back across the crevasses and down the blue cliffs in mean haste, we snatched a few flowers from a warm spot on the edge of the ice, plashed across the moraine streams without Indian ferry, and were paddled aboard, rejoicing in the possession of so blessed a day, and feeling that in very foundational truth we had been to church and had seen God.

JOHN MUIR.