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Sailing Among the Islands--Delightful Views.

Wonderful Variety of Lovely Pictures.

**Effects of Glaciation—An Archipelago of Evergreen Isles.**

**[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLETIN.]**

**FORT WILKESON, ALASKA.** Sept. 25, 1879.

The trip from Victoria to Alaska among the islands, is a peculiarly interesting one. Leaving scientific interests entirely out of consideration, the scenery is so freely unfolded. Gazing from the deck of the steamer one is pushed smoothly along, and from under the evergreen trees, on out through the midst of islands clad with evergreens, that seem the freshest and finest on the face of the globe. The ordinary discomforts of a voyage are not felt at all, because nearly the whole long way to Sitka is in inland waters that are usually as waveless as a mountain lake. It is as if a hundred lakes and islands were joined end to end and sown broadcast with islands, the shore-line refined and beant and in and out curves still more beautiful; the forested land planted thicker; long tapering vistas opened in every direction, and the bright sky often seen and shaded with smooth pearly clouds.

Some guess of the richness of its margins may be formed from the fact that the coast line of Alaska is about 1,100 miles long, while that of the United States is only about 10,000 miles. And this coast line is nearly circular. The Archipelago, stretching between Dixon Entrance and Prince William Sound, has 1,100 islands.

Here is an archipelago in a general way, and, as a whole, it may be regarded as an intricate web of seacoasts, each differing by six or seven miles wide—fine, narrow coast lace trimming the shore and the bush, the bush seen through the bush, the shore seen through the woods, and all greens, which are so varied, and at the same time similar, that may be made of them. For in them one may come to know the trees, and make an easy matter.

Yet what more divine may there be to be wished for than to sail into a narrow channel, hemmed in with mountains, forested down to the water's edge. There is no mountain close about you—the crows cannot hear your name, for there are none to hear it. Over your head the evergreen spires rise higher and higher on the peaks, till all the sea and the sky seem to melt into a gleam of waving sky. The soft rays of the setting sun pour from the summit of a glacier lake on the summit of a glacier, glistening on the summit of a glacier. What beauty! To sketch all this, to paint it, to express it in words, is as hopelessly beyond description. To sketch picturesque bits of scenery, and, in particular, an old church embedded in the mountains, and a lovely meadow and a cascade in its dell, or even a view, is a work of art, to be attempted, and some picture more or less telling made of them. For in them one finds the very heart of true fairyland, and in them one can hear uttering his intensely lonely pleasure, that it is all beauty.

Day after day we seem to be lost in the very heart of true fairyland, each new view seeming more lovely, and more beautiful, the one we choose to have before us. So surprisingly beautified. Day after day we seem to be lost among the islands, so hopelessly beyond description. To sketch picturesque bits of scenery, and, in particular, an old church embedded in the mountains, and a lovely meadow and a cascade in its dell, or even a view, is a work of art, to be attempted, and some picture more or less telling made of them. For in them one finds the very heart of true fairyland, and in them one can hear uttering his intensely lonely pleasure, that it is all beauty.

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**The Trip From Victoria to Alaska among the Islands—Delightful Views.**

**Wonderful Variety of Lovely Pictures.**
In the meanwhile the steamer is so near the shore you may distinctly see the purple cones clustered on the tops of the trees, and the ferns and mosses at their feet. But new scenes are brought to view with magical rapidity. Rounding some bossy cape, the eye is called away into far-reaching vistas, bounded by finely curved headlands in charming array, one dipping gracefully beyond the other, and growing fainter and more ethereal in the distance. The bright, tranquil channel stretches river-like between, stirred here and there by the flash of leaping salmon that rise a foot or two above the water like vivid jets of silver, and by flocks of white gulls floating like lilies among the sun-spangles, while the mellow-tempered sunshine, pouring over all, lends sky! land and water in pale misty blue.

Then, while you are gazing with strange, dreamy longings into the depths of this lovely ocean lane, the steamer, turning into some passage not visible until the moment of entering, glides through into a wide expanse filled with islands, sprinkled or clustered in forms and compositions such as only God could invent. Some sheer-faced, plunging deep into the blue prairie, others rounding off in fine convex rows, or with hollow curves terminating in long level points tipped with sedge. Some are so small the trees growing on them seem like single handfuls culled from the neighboring woods and set in the water to keep them fresh, while here and there at wide intervals you may notice a bare rock just above the water—a black dot, punctuating the end of a full outswelling sentence of islands, every word of which is reflected in the mirror water, form and meaning doubled.

**EFFECTS OF GLACIATION.**

The variety we find, both as to the contours and the collocation of the land masses, is due chiefly to differences in the structure and composition of the rocks out of which they are made, and the unequal amount of glaciation different portions of the landscape have received; some sections having been profoundly influenced by the influx of large steeply-inclined glaciers from the mountains of the mainland. Especially heavy was this influence towards the end of the Glacial Period, when the main ice-sheets, flowing parallel with the coast, was beginning to fail, allowing the local land-ice from the mountains to push further out to sea. And again, the higher of the mountains of the islands nourished local glaciers, some of them of considerable size; which sculptured their summits and sides quite distinctly, making wide shell-shaped amphitheatres at the top, with canyons or valleys leading down from them into the sea, these causes produced much of the obscuring variety of which nature is so fond, but none the less will the studious observer see the underlying harmony—the general trend of the islands in the direction of the flow of the ice, parallel to the coast line, while the main flow was but little influenced by local glaciers on the mainland, and in a direction oblique or at high angles to the shore line where the influence of those local glaciers was greatest. Furthermore, all the islands, great and small as well as the headlands and promontories of the mainland, are seen to have a rounded, over-rubbed, sand-papered appearance, an exquisite finish free of angles, produced by the over-sweeping ice-flood during the appearance of glacial abundance. In these generalizations delicate, complying harmony is everywhere apparent.
The canals, channels, straits passages, sounds, etc., are, of course, subordinate to the same forces as the land masses, and differ from them only in being portions of the one pre-glacial margin of the continent more deeply eroded, and therefore covered with the ocean waters, which flowed into them as the ice was melted out of them. Had the general glacial degradation been greatly less, then these ocean ways would have been valleys, and the islands rounded hills and ridges, forming landscapes with smooth, undulating features like those found above the sea-level wherever the rocks and glacial conditions were similar. In a general way these island-bound channels are like rivers, not only in separate reaches as seen from the deck of a vessel, but continuously so for hundreds of miles in the case of the longest of them; the tide-currents, the fresh driftwood, the inflowing lake-streams and luxuriant over-leaning foliage of the banks making this resemblance all the more complete. But their courses are more direct than those of rivers, on account of the steadiness of the flow of the ice-sheet that eroded them. The impressions produced by the archipelagos are similar to those derived from wide lakes, however much diversified by the islands, and the water seems everywhere deep, never fretted away in shallow, dabbled pools. Some of the islands are continents in different from any view to be had of them, save only on the map; but by far the greater number are small and appreciable as islands, hundreds of them less than a mile long, dotting the shining levels in everlasting beauty. These the eye easily takes in, and dwells upon them with ever fresh delight. In their relations to each other, the individual members of a group have evidently been derived from the same source—hewn from one rock mass; yet they never seem broken or abridged in any way as to their lines of contour, however abruptly they may dip their fronts. Viewed one by one, they seem detached beauties, like extracts from a fine poem, while from the completeness of their lines and the way that their trees are put on, each seems a finished stanza in itself. Contemplating the arrangement of the trees, a distinct impression is produced of their having been sorted and harmonized as to size and correlation like a well-balanced bouquet. In some of the smaller tufted islets, a group of tapering spruces are planted in the middle, and two smaller groups that evidently correspond with each other are planted on the ends at about equal distances from the central group. Or the whole appears as one group, with marked fringing trees that match each other spreading around the outside, like flowers leaning out against the rim of a vase. These relations to harmony are so constant in the island woods, they evidently are the result of design, as much so as the arrangement of the feathers of a bird. Thus perfectly beautiful are these blessed evergreen islands, and their beauty is all the beauty of youth. For though the freshness of their verdure must be attributed to the copious moisture with which they are bathed from the warm ocean river that comes to them from the sunny fountains of Japan, this portion of the Japan current is itself young; while the very existence of the islands, their features, finish and peculiar distribution are all immediately referable to the creative action of the ice during the great winter just now come to a close.

JOHN MUIR.