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ALASKA RIVERS.

Their Number and Characteristics—The Stikine.

Sublime Alpine Scenery—An Alaska Canyon.

Glacier Mud—Suspensoid Glacial Phenomena.

[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM ALASKA.]

ST. THOMAS, December 27, 1879.

Alaska is covered with a network of streams, all fed by cool, perennial streams, that flow over, ever fresh and sweet through grassy plains and mossy hillsides. From every elevated spot, wherever the sea is not too low to wash the foot of the mountains, there becomes a mountain stream, and ever so often the alluvial fans of a mountain pass are found to be the sources of a new stream. Thus a mountain stream may be far beyond the sea, its headwaters down at the base of the mountain range, and yet its source so near the boundary line of Alaska that a man can follow it down a little way and still be seen, by a traveler from the coast, to be in the country of the whites, and yet be within the limits of the Alaska Territory, the area of which is more than twice as large as the United States.

The Yaukon, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Stikine estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Yukon, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Yukon estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Stikine, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Stikine estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Kuskokwim, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Kuskokwim estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Taku, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Taku estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Kluane, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Kluane estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

The Susitna, which is the name of the river that runs down the head of the Susitna estuary, is the largest and most important river in Alaska. It is nearly a hundred miles in length, and is one of the chief streams of the Territory.

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THE STICKLINE—SUBLIME ALPINE PICTURES.

The Stickline is perhaps better known than any other route in Alaska, because of its being the way back to the Cassiar gold mines. It is about 350 or 400 miles long, and navigable first in general westerly direction through the un踏iting plains, darkened here and there with patches of evergreens, and then southward, to the southeast, and then north, entering the Coast Range and from there to the sea. A glacier sweeps across it to the sea, and one Valley more than a hundred miles wide, and from two to eight thousand feet deep. The beautiful and inspiring views are endless. The river

during the winter, the view changes with magical rapidity. The glaciers, too, are the weather.

Alaska, because of the

An Alaska Canyon.

It is not easy to begin anything like a full description, where so great a multitude of varying objects crowd forward into view; nevertheless, I will try to give a few suggestions about this representative canyon, one of the thousands known in Alaska. The river runs on one side, while on the other are the mountains. Entering the

canyon, the gentle breathing of warm winds, the opening of leaves and flowers, birds building their nests, hundred-acre fields of wild roses covering the ground, a linden dome, the swaying of the huckleberry, swaths of fire and willow creeping up the lower slopes of the walls, a mountain mass with a snow-covered peak, gray rain-clouds, and a wintry sky. Avalanches along the main wall of the canyon, the shining of the wet leaves, and the crystals of the glaciers. The loom of the forest, the ax-songs of the woodmen. The color-grandeur morning and evening, changing in glorious harmony through all the seasons and years.

Stupendous Glaciers.

Along the fifteen miles above the mouth of the river, there are the bases of the great ice-cascades, pouring down through the forest in a shatter ed ice-cascade nearly to the level of the river. Here the canyon is about two miles wide, planted with cottonwoods along the banks of the river, and in the middle line of the canyon—a group of glacier-laden Alpes from ten to twelve thousand feet high, the source of the largest of the Yosemite falls. These large glaciers, further on the walls are steeper and smoother, offering fine ways for avalanches, and little access for trees, that they do not resemble, like those of the Merced Yosemite. The granite, too, has the same neutral gray tone, and its white structure and general aspect are similar. Cascades are chanting everywhere, descending in white ribbons from the great heights, to the lower levels, where they change to foam, and are lost. On one massive rock-front, corniced with ice, I counted eight that formed a fine lace-work, hanging above, and were so large that they fringed their edges. The largest booms like Yosemite Falls in the spring, pouring from the intricately formed ice-cascades of the glaciers into the river, in a snowy plume, two thousand feet long.
Thirty-five miles above the mouth of the river, the most striking object of all comes in sight. This is the lower expanded portion of the great glacier, measuring about six miles around the snout, pushed boldly forward into the middle of the valley among the trees, while its sources are mostly hidden. It takes its rise in the heart of the range, some thirty or forty miles away. Compared with this the Swiss mer de glace is a small thing. It is called the “Ice Mountain,” and seems to have been regarded as a motionless mass, created on the spot, like the rocks and trees about it, without venturing a guess as to how or when. The front of the snout is about 300 feet high, but rises rapidly back for a few miles to a height of about a thousand feet. Seen through gaps in the trees growing on one of its terminal moraines, as one sails slowly along against the current, the marvelous beauty of the chasms and clustered pinnacles show to fine advantage in the sunshine; but tame indeed must be the observer who is satisfied with so cheap a view.

INDIAN TRADITIONS—INDIAN TRADER.

On the opposite side of the river there is another large glacier flowing, river like, through the forested mountain bosses. Some 300 years ago these two glaciers, say the Indians, once pushed their snouts together and the river flowed beneath in a grand tunnel, through which they sometimes ventured in canoes. This tradition is interesting as containing a truth carried hundreds of years without suffering much. That they did meet is undoubtedly true, though more than 300 years ago, as the age of the spruces growing on the banks of the river show. Between the snouts of these two noble glaciers lives Choquette. Happy man—perhaps somewhat blind to his blessings. It was not without grave misgivings, he told me, that he ventured to build here, fearing something would happen in connection with that strange ice mountain. He is an Indian trader, the only settler on the river up to within a few miles of Glenora. Some thirty-five miles above this place the Hudson Bay Company had a trading post, now abandoned.

MORE GLACIERS.

The great glacier is hardly out of sight ere we come upon another of grand size, pouring a majestic white flood through the evergreens of the river level, while almost every hollow and tributary canyon contains a smaller one, according to the size of the area it drains; some like mere snow banks, others with the blue ice apparent, depending in heavy bulging curves and graduating into the river-like forms that maze through the lower forested regions, and are so striking in appearance that they are admired even by the passing miners with gold dust in their
eyes. I counted a hundred and sixty-one in sight from the river, but the whole number drained by the river throughout its entire course is probably three hundred or more. A very short geological time ago this magnificent canyon was occupied by a grand trunk glacier that flowed to the sea, to which all these residual glaciers were united as tributaries.

A YOUNG WORLD.

The Stickine, like all the other rivers of Alaska, is still young and imperfect, like a half-developed plant. The trunk is well formed, but the branches are only short stumps, slowly growing upward right and left over a hundred mountains as the glaciers melt back in compliance with climate. The trunks of some of the shorter rivers heading in the Coast Range are still as imperfect as the branches of the larger ones, while a few that are predestined to take their places in the general system have not yet commenced to flow. Over the region stretching from the north arm of Cross Sound towards Mount St. Elias, the glacial winter still rules. All the landscape is covered by a remnant of the ice-sheet. When it melts the area of the sea will be somewhat extended, and several rivers added to the number already in existence.

A short time ago there was not a single river in Alaska.

JOHN MUIR.