

The recent acquisition by the United States government, of the Russian possessions in the northwestern portion of the American continent, and the rumor, not perhaps entirely destitute of foundation, of the proposed transfer of the tract of country still intervening between the territories of Washington and Alaska from the jurisdiction of Great Britain to that of the United States, in settlement of the "Alabama claims," has awakened in the minds of our countrymen a renewed interest in all that relates to the hitherto almost unknown regions lying to the northward of the forty ninth parallel of latitude and westward of the Rocky Mountains, known to geographers under the names of British Columbia, New Caledonia, and Russian America.

It having been my fortune, while engaged
 in the service of the Russo-American
 telegraph company some two or three
 years since, to conduct an exploration
 throughout the entire extent of British
 Columbia, and a portion of Russian
 America, a distance of nearly 1500
 miles, I was enabled by personal obser-
 vation to become comparatively well
 acquainted with the region under
 consideration, and I will endeavor
 this evening, to touch briefly upon
 some of the more interesting features
 of this remote portion of our continent,
~~and~~ The western coast of North
 America, from the Gulf of Georgia—
~~to the point~~ which marks the boundary
 line between the United States and
 the British Possessions, — northward
 to Lynn Canal, a distance of a
 thousand miles, presents one of the
 most singular and intricate systems
 of inland navigation that has ever

been discovered in any part of the world. The main land itself is bordered with a formidable range of snow clad mountains, - whose height apparently increases as we proceed northward, - running parallel with it at an average distance of perhaps fifty miles. The characteristic features of the coast line, are the numerous arms of the sea, variously called canals, inlets, and arms, which are of great depth, and penetrate into the mountains to distances varying from thirty to over one hundred miles. An archipelago of mountain islands, intersected in every conceivable direction by navigable channels, borders the whole coast, so that it is possible to pass with an ocean steamer from the straits of Tzuea to the Lyma canal, a distance as before stated, of over one thousand miles, without more than twice encountering the open ocean, and then

only for comparatively a short distance, which may be passed over in two or three hours.

The scenery of these inlets, is grand, gloomy, and wonderful, beyond description. The mountain walls descend almost perpendicularly ~~into~~ to the water's edge, their steep slopes clothed with evergreens, and their summits glittering with eternal snow. From the glaciers above, descend ~~summit~~ numberless mountain streams, glistening in silver foam through the shadows of the forest, and sometimes leaping in a sheer fall, hundreds of feet into the sea. In the vicinity of Knight's canal, a river flows for 15 miles through a magnificent glacier tunnel, one hundred feet in height and as many yards in breadth. Throughout this whole region, rugged mountains, cliffs and precipices, thrown together without system or order,


pine clad slopes and snowy peaks, gloomy valleys and picturesque waterfalls, form a combination of wild and sublime, though strangely desolate scenery, the like of which is to be found in no other portion of the world. These lofty mountain ranges extend along the whole coast, from the Gulf of Georgia to the Peninsula of Alaska, forming in most places an impassable barrier between the ocean and the interior of the country, which is accessible from the coast, only at the heads of some of the inlets, and through the narrow valleys of the small streams flowing into them.

The interior of the upper portion of British Columbia, called by the fur traders New Caledonia, consists in great part of an elevated table land, 3000 feet above the level of the sea, and extending from the

Coast range to the Rocky Mountains, interspersed with irregular, detached ranges of mountains, and numerous fresh water lakes from 50 to 100 miles in length. In this region are the sources of the four great rivers which flow into the Pacific, north of the forty ninth parallel; The Frazer, the Skeena, the Stikine and the Yukon. The Frazer river, after uniting with the eastern branch which rises ^{among} ~~in~~ the Rocky Mountains, flows southward through the whole extent of British Columbia, breaking through the coast ranges, and discharging its waters into the Gulf of Georgia. The last named river, the Yukon, has well been termed the "Mississippi" of the North." Having its source in the region above referred to, it flows northward and westward a distance of over two thousand miles through

the British possessions and the territory of Alaska, till it meets the waters of the Pacific, at short distance south of Behring's strait. Yet previous to the explorations carried out under the directions of the Russo-American telegraph company, the very existence of this magnificent river, was almost unknown. Still in the same neighborhood we find the head waters of the Mc Kenzie, another river equalling if not exceeding the Yukon in length and volume, which in its long course to the Frozen ocean, has for more than a century formed the grand highway of the fur traders of the Hudson Bay Company, in their journeyings to and from that inhospitable region.

The first European explorer who penetrated the region now known as British Columbia, was Alexander

 Mc Kenzie of the Hudson Bay Company who in 1790, crossed the Rocky mountains and made his way alone through an unknown region, and among savage and hostile tribes, reaching the Pacific at Bentinck arm, and returning by nearly the same route. He supposed the Frazer to be one of the northern branches of the Columbia. In 1812, Frazer, an employe of the Northwest fur company, reached the river again from the interior, traced it very far down, and made it almost certain that it was not a branch of the Columbia, but that it entered into the Gulf of Georgia. Sir George Simpson, governor of the Hudson Bay Company's territories was the first explorer who traversed the whole river from its source to its mouth, in the year 1828. For thirty years from this time, the whole country

remained exclusively under the dominion of the Hudson Bay Company. It was not the interest of this organization who held a monopoly of the valuable fur trade, and the almost equally profitable sale of European goods to the natives, to encourage immigration, or make known the fine climate and ample capabilities of the country.

In 1858 the news reached California of the discovery of rich and extensive gold diggings upon the bars of Frazer River. Thousands of adventurers from the Pacific states, and elsewhere flocked towards the new Eldorado. Victoria, the principal harbor on Vancouver island, from an unimportant trading port, suddenly became a city of 10,000 inhabitants, and the principal depot of supplies for the Frazer River region. Supplying themselves here with such necessaries as they required for

their journey, the gold seekers pushed forward by steamers, sailing vessels, canoes, and every possible means of conveyance, across the Gulf of Georgia, and up the valley of the wild northern river, in search of the glittering treasure that mingled with its sands. When the surface washings of the lower river became exhausted, the more adventurous spirits penetrated to the upper portion of the river, discovering at length the rich and extensive gold fields of Cariboo 400 miles to the northward, which eventually resulted in the opening of an excellent wagon road, and the formation of a line of settlements ~~the~~ from the gold mines, to the head of steamboat navigation on the lower river.

The trip up the lower Fraser, in one of the small but powerful stern-wheel steamers, employed in its navigation, is an interesting and at

times a somewhat exciting experience,
~~It was in June, that~~

I was during the early part of the month of June, that I took passage in one of these boats on my way to the interior of the colony. The scenery of the river exhibits few points of interest until we reached the Harrism River, which enters the Fraser 65 miles from its mouth. Beyond this point the mountains begin to close in upon the river; the banks become higher and the current much more powerful. The navigation grew more and more difficult as we proceeded, the river being greatly swollen by the melting of the snows in the northern mountains, and sweeping along with almost irresistible force. The powerful engines of the little ~~steam~~ boat, aided by a pressure of steam which seemed to strain the boilers almost to the point of bursting, gradually

forced her up the rapid river. For
 the last fifteen miles before reaching
 the ~~head of navigation at Yale~~, the
 navigation is perhaps the most
 difficult, and dangerous ever attempted
 by a steamer. At one point, a reef
 of rocks extends into the river, forming
 a violent rapid, which in high water
 frequently becomes too powerful for any
 steamer to stem. Standing beside the
 captain on the upper deck, as the
 boat neared this rapid, I watched
 the struggle with the most intense
 interest. The engineer could be heard
 below, stirring up his fires, and getting
 up as much pressure as the boilers
 might or might not bear, for the
 coming ~~struggle~~ ^{contest} between the forces of
 steam and ~~with~~ water. As we touched
 the foot of the rapid, three quick
 strokes of the signal bell are heard
 in the engine room, and instantly every
 timber of the light built vessel

trembles with the powerful strokes of the ^{machinery} engines. Slowly but steadily she climbs the rapid, until her bow touches the muffled water at the top, when she seems to pause. We watch the trees upon the shore to see if we can detect her movement. "All forward," shouts the captain, and the passengers rush to the bow, and gather in a little knot upon the deck. Now the steamer slowly glides forward again for a few ~~minutes~~ moments, and the captain quietly remarks. "We have made the riffle."

Rounding a projecting point we enter a nook walled in by lofty frowning mountains on every side, around whose summits the snow clouds are still floating, although it is early summer in the valley. On a narrow shelf between the mountains and the river, nests the three score

white houses that form the town of Yale. Just above, the Fraser rushes forth from a narrow defile between the rocky walls of almost perpendicular mountains five or six thousand feet in height. This is the limit of all navigation below the cascade range, although adventurous gold hunters have even essayed to pass the great canon with their canoes and boats, and not a few of them have forfeited their lives in the attempt.

The overpowering and terrible grandeur of the scenery of the Fraser in its passage through the mountains between Lytton and Yale is utterly beyond description. For over fifty miles the great river has forced a narrow passage for itself through the heart of the Cascade

Range, and when viewed from a
 high point on the wagon road
 a few miles above Gale, the
 scene which is presented to the
 eye is one which can never be
 forgotten. Looking down into
 a narrow gorge many hundred
 feet below, the whirling river
 white with foam is seen
 rushing along with fearful
 velocity, walled in on each
 side by precipitous cliffs which
 almost exclude the daylight
 from the stream, while on
 every ~~side~~ side peaks upon peaks
 rise thousands of feet above
 the river, each more rugged,
 bold, and grand than the
 last. From the great
 patches of snow and ice upon
 their summits, streams descend
 in glittering cascades from cliff
 to cliff, till they are lost in
 the foaming torrent of the

Trazer, whose continuous roar comes up to the ear, mingled with the solemn sighing of the wind through the mountain pines, and filling the mind of the spectator with strangely mingled feelings of awe and loneliness.

The wagon road leading from Yale along the bank of the river, through the mountains to the interior is in many places a remarkable feat of engineering, not so much from the labor expended in overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles, as from the ingenuity often displayed in avoiding them. It follows the river closely for fifty miles, crossing it at one point by an elegant suspension bridge. ~~and~~

Beyond the mountains it diverges to the eastward, passing over the great interior plateau of British

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Columbia, through a beautiful and picturesque country, composed of a succession of hills and valleys, lakes and rivers, exhibiting to the eye of the traveller accustomed to the endless forests of the coast, the unusual and grateful spectacle of green hills crowning slopes and level meadows, with scarcely a bush or tree to obstruct the view, and everywhere dotted with a luxuriant growth of grass.

250 miles above Yale the road once more comes out upon the bank of the Frazer at Soda Creek, where the passengers are transferred to a small steamer flying between that point and the settlement at Quesnel, about seventy five miles above.

As a specimen of Yankee enterprise, this little craft just mentioned deserves a passing notice.

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Long before the advent of wagon roads
or any means of transportation other
than pack mules, she was
built, and launched, and put in
successful operation. Her boilers
and machinery, constructed in small
~~pieces~~ sections, were brought 300
miles on the backs of animals,
and all her timbers were sawed
by hand from the forest trees
growing on the bank of the river.

Her builder, ~~and~~ a Vermonter,
informed me that her total cost
was upwards of 60,000 dollars.

From Quesnel, which may
be looked upon as the northern
outpost of civilization in British
Columbia, a road leads eastward
50 miles to the ~~celebrated~~ gold
fields of Cariboo.

The journey up the Fraser, through
the wilderness from Quesnel to
Stuarts Lake, a distance of 250

miles, is toilsome and arduous in the extreme. It was performed in one of the large boats of the Hudson Bay Company, heavily laden with provisions and stores and managed by a crew of seven stout voyagers. The work of getting the boat up against the ~~powerful~~ ^{rapid} current is mostly performed by tracking, which consists in hauling it with a long line attached to the bow, and 5 or 6 men walking along the shore. The work is very severe, the men being obliged to travel over all sorts of ground, and along high alluvial banks where a foothold can scarcely be obtained, and their clothes are frequently wet continuously for days together. When the nature of the shore is such as to render tracking impracticable, the method known

as "Joking" is resorted to. We were able to make about 12 or 15 miles per day, encamping every night, in the open air, beneath the shadows of the forest.

At a point a few miles above Quesnel the cliffs on the river bank have assumed numberless fantastic shapes, the most remarkable of which are the sharp pointed spires, turrets and pinnacles, left standing in isolated positions by the disintegration of neighboring masses. Standing out from the main body of the cliff, high above the river, 2 or 300 of these singular formations may be counted. The principal one which is some 50 feet in height, when viewed from the river, forms a most perfect colossal statue of a monk,

standing on a pedestal, and beautifully relieved against a background of dark green foliage. These formations are known as the needles, and form one of the greatest natural curiosities of this region.

Slowly journeying up the river, three weeks after leaving Ouesnel, we reached Fort St James, a lonely Hudson Bay trading post, at the foot of Stuar's Lake, in New Caledonia. Two or three commodious log buildings surrounded by a stockade about ten feet in height, ~~are~~ constituted the fort. The stockade, was in days gone by intended as a means of defence against the natives, but at the present time the latter are so few in number and so submissive in spirit, that no precautions beyond keeping a

watch dog ~~at~~ ^{two} about the yard are deemed necessary, the gate being always wide open to all who may choose to enter.


We met with a kind and cordial welcome from the chief trader, and his assistant, who were evidently not sorry to have the monotony of their solitary life broken in upon by visitors from the world they had left behind so many years ago. #

Tarrying here but a few days, we kept onward with our boat, through a chain of large lakes and their connecting rivers, extending ~~the~~ northward among the mountains, and at the head of the upper lake, ^{called} Talla, we encamped one bright autumnal morning, hauled our boat up on the beach, and commenced preparations to go into winter quarters.

Before the snows of November had fairly set in, we had constructed a comfortable log cabin, in the woods near the lake shore, and thoroughly fortified ourselves against the severities of a northern winter. Our nearest neighbor was a trader at Fort Connely, sixty miles distant, the portions of the country being entirely deserted by the natives, and indeed showing no apparent indications of ever having been visited by a human being.

Our house being situated in 56° of north latitude, the days became very short in December. Indeed at one time, the daylight only lasted from 11 o'clock till 2 each day. In January we began to experience the truth of the old saying, "As the days begin to lengthen the cold begins to strengthen." On the 11th of that month the

Thermometer went below zero and remained there continuously for two or three weeks, ~~remaining~~ ^{standing} at 45 below ~~zero~~ on one occasion for three days, and once even reaching 50, causing the trees in the surrounding forest to split from top to bottom with a report like a rifle, ~~so~~ ~~that~~ a continuous fusillade was kept up all night in this manner, so that it was sometimes almost impossible to sleep. The greater part of the snow fell in the early part of the winter, and by the first of January it was four or five feet deep in the valley. Notwithstanding the severity of the ~~climate~~ cold, we experienced less inconvenience from it than would be thought possible by a person unacquainted with the climate. During the entire winter, we were much in



the open air, frequently being absent a week or two at a time. Hunting and trapping, travelling on snow shoes, and sleeping at night under the friendly ~~shelter~~ shelter of some low branching evergreen, warmed by the cheerful blaze of a great fire of pine logs.

The Christmas holidays were celebrated with great spirit, and a grand ball, was given in the evening, which was attended by delegations from all the Indian tribes within a hundred miles, ~~at~~ ~~on which occasion many comical scenes occurred.~~ The dusky belles of the forest, radiant in scarlet cloth, feathers, and vermillion, seemed to enjoy the occasion quite as much as their pale faced sisters do, in similar gatherings in more civilized

communities.

During the winter we made an excursion to visit our neighbor as Fort Connoly, ^{which is} situated at the extreme limit of previous exploration in a northerly direction. Three days' journey on snow shoes brought us to Lake Connoly, on whose banks the fort is situated. This sheet of water is about 12 miles in length ~~but~~ ^{and quite} narrow, but the grandeur and beauty of its scenery is far beyond ^{adequate} description. The mountains on every side, rise almost perpendicularly to the height of six thousand feet, and the immense glaciers which cling to their sides, seem ready to fall at any moment, and overwhelm the narrow valley with instant destruction. The immediate border of the lake is densely wooded with fir trees on every side, giving

a beautiful thing somewhat ~~sober~~ ^{sombre} aspect. We found the structure which on the map of North America is dignified by the title of Fort Comody, to be a wretched log shanty, twenty feet square, roofed with bark, the whole affair being in the last stages of dilapidation. The trader, who lived in this remote and inaccessible place, ~~was found~~ ^{proved} to be a man of intelligence and cultivation, ^{and} a graduate of a distinguished European university. He had lived here alone with the natives for many years, and told us that he had not the least desire to ever again subject himself to the petty vexations and annoyances of civilized life. And I may remark that ~~this~~ in my journeyings through that country I was surprised by ~~a man~~ meeting with

a number of instances of ~~this~~ the same kind. He afterwards returned on visit, and considering that our houses were 60 or 70 miles apart, we became quite neighborly during the winter.

In the latter part of February I started, accompanied by a single white companion, on an expedition ~~rather~~ through the entirely unknown country lying to the northward of Lake Comely, with the ultimate intention of striking the upper waters of the Stikine, and following it down through the mountains to the Pacific. This river had been explored for a distance of two hundred miles from the sea, but nothing whatever was known of its course above this point.

With a ~~sledge~~ train of four dogs, drawing a sledge laden with

Provisions, and with no guide but the compass, we pushed forward into the wilderness, following a valley running north-westerly between lofty mountains. Day after day the sun ~~was~~ ^{upon us} shone from a cloudless sky, going down ~~at~~ at evening behind the snowy peaks, which it illuminated with a dazzling magnificence of color never witnessed except in the enchanted regions of the north.

Night after night, we lay down with our faithful dogs upon our fragrant couch of fir boughs, with no roof above us but the dark blue polar sky, until at length, two hundred miles from our starting point, we reached a level plateau high among the mountains, beyond which the valley country gently sloped to the northward.

showing that we had at last reached the basin of the Steknie, and the task remained of following the ~~little~~ brook at our feet until its waters mingled with the Pacific. That little brook led us a long, weary, and circuitous journey, and early in April we found ourselves at the head of the great canon of the Steknie, with only a few days provisions remaining, having already been obliged to kill one of our famished dogs to furnish the remainder with food.

The great canon, as it is called, is a chasm, eighty miles in length and varying from 500 to 2000 feet in depth, ~~with perpendicular~~ having in most places perpendicular walls of basaltic rock, and through the whole length of which the

river flows with great ~~violence~~ ^{rapidity}. The scenery, as may well be imagined is of the most overpowering and awful description. We avoided the worst portion of this canon by an overland portage of forty miles, and then, not without great difficulty and danger, descended to the bottom of the ~~canyon~~ chasm. We ~~then~~ continued along upon the ice, which still clung to the perpendicular cliffs on each side, the middle portion having already broken away, leaving an open space through which the water rushed along with fearful violence. In many places the ice was entirely gone, and we were obliged to carry everything, even our dogs, around and over precipitous ledges hundreds of feet in height, where a single false step would have entailed instant destruction.