

***JOHN MUIR,  
S. HALL YOUNG***



***ALASKA  
TRAVELS***

**John Muir, S. Hall Young**

# **Alaska Travels**

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TRAVELS IN ALASKA

THE CRUISE OF THE CORWIN

STICKEEN: THE STORY OF A DOG

ALASKA DAYS WITH JOHN MUIR *by Samuel Hall Young*

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## **Preface**

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Forty years ago John Muir wrote to a friend; "I am hopelessly and forever a mountaineer. . . . Civilization and fever, and all the morbidness that has been hooted at me, have not dimmed my glacial eyes, and I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness." How gloriously he fulfilled the promise of his early manhood! Fame, all unbidden, wore a path to his door, but he always remained a modest, unspoiled mountaineer. Kindred spirits, the greatest of his time, sought him out, even in his mountain cabin, and felt honored by his friendship. Ralph Waldo Emerson urged him to visit Concord and rest awhile from the strain of his solitary studies in the Sierra Nevada. But nothing could dislodge him from the glacial problems of the high Sierra; with passionate interest he kept at his task. "The grandeur of these forces and their glorious results," he once wrote, "overpower me and inhabit my whole being. Waking or sleeping, I have no rest. In dreams I read blurred sheets of glacial writing, or follow lines of cleavage, or struggle with the difficulties of some extraordinary rock-form."

There is a note of pathos, the echo of an unfulfilled hope, in the record of his later visit to Concord. "It was seventeen years after our parting on Wawona ridge that I stood beside his [Emerson's] grave under a pine tree on the hill above Sleepy Hollow. He had gone to higher Sierras, and, as I fancied, was again waving his hand in friendly recognition." And now John Muir has followed his friend of other days to the "higher Sierras." His earthly remains lie among trees planted by his own hand. To the pine tree of Sleepy Hollow answers a guardian sequoia in the sunny Alhambra Valley.

In 1879 John Muir went to Alaska for the first time. Its stupendous living glaciers aroused his unbounded interest, for they enabled him to verify his theories of glacial action. Again and again he returned to this continental laboratory of landscapes. The greatest of the tide-water glaciers appropriately commemorates his name. Upon this book of Alaska travels, all but finished before his unforeseen departure, John Muir expended the last months of his life. It was begun soon after his return from Africa in 1912. His eager leadership of the ill-fated campaign to save his beloved Hetch-Hetchy Valley from commercial destruction seriously interrupted his labors. Illness, also, interposed some checks as he worked with characteristic care and thoroughness through the great mass of Alaska notes that had accumulated under his hands for more than thirty years.

The events recorded in this volume end in the middle of the trip of 1890. Muir's notes on the remainder of the journey have not been found, and it is idle to speculate how he would have concluded the volume if he had lived to complete it. But no one will read the fascinating description of the Northern Lights without feeling a poetical appropriateness in the fact that his last work ends with a portrayal of the auroras--one of those phenomena which elsewhere he described as "the most glorious of all the terrestrial manifestations of God."

Muir's manuscripts bear on every page impressive evidence of the pains he took in his literary work, and the lofty standard he set himself in his scientific studies. The counterfeiting of a fact or of an experience was a thing unthinkable in connection with John Muir. He was tireless in pursuing the meaning of a physiographical fact, and his extraordinary physical endurance usually enabled him to trail it to its last hiding-place. Often, when telling the tale of his adventures in Alaska, his eyes would kindle with youthful enthusiasm, and he would live over again the red-blooded years that yielded him "shapeless harvests of revealed glory."

For a number of months just prior to his death he had the friendly assistance of Mrs. Marion Randall Parsons. Her familiarity with the manuscript, and with Mr. Muir's expressed and penciled intentions of revision and arrangement, made her the logical person to prepare it in final form for publication. It was a task to which she brought devotion as well as ability. The labor involved was the greater in order that the finished work might exhibit the last touches of Muir's master-hand, and yet contain nothing that did not flow from his pen. All readers of this book will feel grateful for her labor of love.

I add these prefatory lines to the work of my departed friend with pensive misgiving, knowing that he would have deprecated any discharge of musketry over his grave. His daughters, Mrs. Thomas Rea Hanna and Mrs. Buel Alvin Funk, have honored me with the request to transmit the manuscript for publication, and later to consider with them what salvage may be made from among their father's unpublished writings. They also wish me to express their grateful acknowledgments to Houghton Mifflin Company, with whom John Muir has always maintained close and friendly relations.

William Frederic Badè.



Berkeley, California,  
*May, 1915.*

# **Part I**

## **The Trip of 1879**

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# Chapter I

## Puget Sound and British Columbia

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After eleven years of study and exploration in the Sierra Nevada of California and the mountain-ranges of the Great Basin, studying in particular their glaciers, forests, and wild life, above all their ancient glaciers and the influence they exerted in sculpturing the rocks over which they passed with tremendous pressure, making new landscapes, scenery, and beauty which so mysteriously influence every human being, and to some extent all life, I was anxious to gain some knowledge of the regions to the northward, about Puget Sound and Alaska. With this grand object in view I left San Francisco in May, 1879, on the steamer Dakota, without any definite plan, as with the exception of a few of the Oregon peaks and their forests all the wild north was new to me.

To the mountaineer a sea voyage is a grand, inspiring, restful change. For forests and plains with their flowers and fruits we have new scenery, new life of every sort; water hills and dales in eternal visible motion for rock waves, types of permanence.

It was curious to note how suddenly the eager countenances of the passengers were darkened as soon as the good ship passed through the Golden Gate and began to heave on the waves of the open ocean. The crowded deck was speedily deserted on account of seasickness. It seemed strange that nearly every one afflicted should be more or less ashamed.

Next morning a strong wind was blowing, and the sea was gray and white, with long breaking waves, across which the Dakota was racing half-buried in spray. Very few of the passengers were on deck to enjoy the wild scenery. Every

wave seemed to be making enthusiastic, eager haste to the shore, with long, irised tresses streaming from its tops, some of its outer fringes borne away in scud to refresh the wind, all the rolling, pitching, flying water exulting in the beauty of rainbow light. Gulls and albatrosses, strong, glad life in the midst of the stormy beauty, skimmed the waves against the wind, seemingly without effort, oftentimes flying nearly a mile without a single wing-beat, gracefully swaying from side to side and tracing the curves of the briny water hills with the finest precision, now and then just grazing the highest.

And yonder, glistening amid the irised spray, is still more striking revelation of warm life in the so-called howling waste,—a half-dozen whales, their broad backs like glaciated bosses of granite heaving aloft in near view, spouting lustily, drawing a long breath, and plunging down home in colossal health and comfort. A merry school of porpoises, a square mile of them, suddenly appear, tossing themselves into the air in abounding strength and hilarity, adding foam to the waves and making all the wilderness wilder. One cannot but feel sympathy with and be proud of these brave neighbors, fellow citizens in the commonwealth of the world, making a living like the rest of us. Our good ship also seemed like a thing of life, its great iron heart beating on through calm and storm, a truly noble spectacle. But think of the hearts of these whales, beating warm against the sea, day and night, through dark and light, on and on for centuries; how the red blood must rush and gurgle in and out, bucketfuls, barrelands at a beat!

The cloud colors of one of the four sunsets enjoyed on the voyage were remarkably pure and rich in tone. There was a well-defined range of cumuli a few degrees above the horizon, and a massive, dark-gray rain-cloud above it, from which depended long, bent fringes overlapping the lower cumuli and partially veiling them; and from time to time sunbeams poured through narrow openings and painted the

exposed bosses and fringes in ripe yellow tones, which, with the reflections on the water, made magnificent pictures. The scenery of the ocean, however sublime in vast expanse, seems far less beautiful to us dry-shod animals than that of the land seen only in comparatively small patches; but when we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty.

The California coast-hills and cliffs look bare and uninviting as seen from the ship, the magnificent forests keeping well back out of sight beyond the reach of the sea winds; those of Oregon and Washington are in some places clad with conifers nearly down to the shore; even the little detached islets, so marked a feature to the northward, are mostly tree-crowned. Up through the Straits of Juan de Fuca the forests, sheltered from the ocean gales and favored with abundant rains, flourish in marvelous luxuriance on the glacier-sculptured mountains of the Olympic Range.

We arrived in Esquimault Harbor, three miles from Victoria, on the evening of the fourth day, and drove to the town through a magnificent forest of Douglas spruce,--with an undergrowth in open spots of oak, madrone, hazel, dogwood, alder, spiræa, willow, and wild rose,--and around many an upswelling *moutonné* rock, freshly glaciated and furred with yellow mosses and lichens.

Victoria, the capital of British Columbia, was in 1879 a small old-fashioned English town on the south end of Vancouver Island. It was said to contain about six thousand inhabitants. The government buildings and some of the business blocks were noticeable, but the attention of the traveler was more worthily attracted to the neat cottage homes found here, embowered in the freshest and floweriest climbing roses and honeysuckles conceivable. Californians may well be proud of their home roses loading

sunny verandas, climbing to the tops of the roofs and falling over the gables in white and red cascades. But here, with so much bland fog and dew and gentle laving rain, a still finer development of some of the commonest garden plants is reached. English honeysuckle seems to have found here a most congenial home. Still more beautiful were the wild roses, blooming in wonderful luxuriance along the woodland paths, with corollas two and three inches wide. This rose and three species of spiræa fairly filled the air with fragrance after showers; and how brightly then did the red dogwood berries shine amid the green leaves beneath trees two hundred and fifty feet high.

Strange to say, all of this exuberant forest and flower vegetation was growing upon fresh moraine material scarcely at all moved or in any way modified by post-glacial agents. In the town gardens and orchards, peaches and apples fell upon glacier-polished rocks, and the streets were graded in moraine gravel; and I observed scratched and grooved rock bosses as unweathered and telling as those of the High Sierra of California eight thousand feet or more above sea-level. The Victoria Harbor is plainly glacial in origin, eroded from the solid; and the rock islets that rise here and there in it are unchanged to any appreciable extent by all the waves that have broken over them since first they came to light toward the close of the glacial period. The shores also of the harbor are strikingly grooved and scratched and in every way as glacial in all their characteristics as those of new-born glacial lakes. That the domain of the sea is being slowly extended over the land by incessant wave-action is well known; but in this freshly glaciated region the shores have been so short a time exposed to wave-action that they are scarcely at all wasted. The extension of the sea affected by its own action in post-glacial times is probably less than the millionth part of that affected by glacial action during the last glacier period. The direction of the flow of the ice-sheet to which all the main

features of this wonderful region are due was in general southward.

From this quiet little English town I made many short excursions--up the coast to Nanaimo, to Burrard Inlet, now the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, to Puget Sound, up Fraser River to New Westminster and Yale at the head of navigation, charmed everywhere with the wild, new-born scenery. The most interesting of these and the most difficult to leave was the Puget Sound region, famous the world over for the wonderful forests of gigantic trees about its shores. It is an arm and many-fingered hand of the sea, reaching southward from the Straits of Juan de Fuca about a hundred miles into the heart of one of the noblest coniferous forests on the face of the globe. All its scenery is wonderful--broad river-like reaches sweeping in beautiful curves around bays and capes and jutting promontories, opening here and there into smooth, blue, lake-like expanses dotted with islands and feathered with tall, spiry evergreens, their beauty doubled on the bright mirror-water.

Sailing from Victoria, the Olympic Mountains are seen right ahead, rising in bold relief against the sky, with jagged crests and peaks from six to eight thousand feet high,--small residual glaciers and ragged snow-fields beneath them in wide amphitheatres opening down through the forest-filled valleys. These valleys mark the courses of the Olympic glaciers at the period of their greatest extension, when they poured their tribute into that portion of the great northern ice-sheet that overswept Vancouver Island and filled the strait between it and the mainland.

On the way up to Olympia, then a hopeful little town situated at the end of one of the longest fingers of the Sound, one is often reminded of Lake Tahoe, the scenery of the widest expanses is so lake-like in the clearness and stillness of the water and the luxuriance of the surrounding forests. Doubling cape after cape, passing uncounted islands, new combinations break on the view in endless

variety, sufficient to satisfy the lover of wild beauty through a whole life. When the clouds come down, blotting out everything, one feels as if at sea; again lifting a little, some islet may be seen standing alone with the tops of its trees dipping out of sight in gray misty fringes; then the ranks of spruce and cedar bounding the water's edge come to view; and when at length the whole sky is clear the colossal cone of Mt. Rainier may be seen in spotless white, looking down over the dark woods from a distance of fifty or sixty miles, but so high and massive and so sharply outlined, it seems to be just back of a strip of woods only a few miles wide.

Mt. Rainier, or Tahoma (the Indian name), is the noblest of the volcanic cones extending from Lassen Butte and Mt. Shasta along the Cascade Range to Mt. Baker. One of the most telling views of it hereabouts is obtained near Tacoma. From a bluff back of the town it was revealed in all its glory, laden with glaciers and snow down to the forested foothills around its finely curved base. Up to this time (1879) it had been ascended but once. From observations made on the summit with a single aneroid barometer, it was estimated to be about 14,500 feet high. Mt. Baker, to the northward, is about 10,700 feet high, a noble mountain. So also are Mt. Adams, Mt. St. Helens, and Mt. Hood. The latter, overlooking the town of Portland, is perhaps the best known. Rainier, about the same height as Shasta, surpasses them all in massive icy grandeur,--the most majestic solitary mountain I had ever yet beheld. How eagerly I gazed and longed to climb it and study its history only the mountaineer may know, but I was compelled to turn away and bide my time.

The species forming the bulk of the woods here is the Douglas spruce (*Pseudotsuga douglasii*), one of the greatest of the western giants. A specimen that I measured near Olympia was about three hundred feet in height and twelve feet in diameter four feet above the ground. It is a widely distributed tree, extending northward through British Columbia, southward through Oregon and California, and



eastward to the Rocky Mountains. The timber is used for shipbuilding, spars, piles, and the framework of houses, bridges, etc. In the California lumber markets it is known as "Oregon pine." In Utah, where it is common on the Wahsatch Mountains, it is called "red pine." In California, on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, it forms, in company with the yellow pine, sugar pine, and incense cedar, a pretty well-defined belt at a height of from three to six thousand feet above the sea; but it is only in Oregon and Washington, especially in this Puget Sound region, that it reaches its very grandest development,--tall, straight, and strong, growing down close to tidewater.

All the towns of the Sound had a hopeful, thrifty aspect. Port Townsend, picturesquely located on a grassy bluff, was the port of clearance for vessels sailing to foreign parts. Seattle was famed for its coal-mines, and claimed to be the coming town of the North Pacific Coast. So also did its rival, Tacoma, which had been selected as the terminus of the much-talked-of Northern Pacific Railway. Several coal-veins of astonishing thickness were discovered the winter before on the Carbon River, to the east of Tacoma, one of them said to be no less than twenty-one feet, another twenty feet, another fourteen, with many smaller ones, the aggregate thickness of all the veins being upwards of a hundred feet. Large deposits of magnetic iron ore and brown hematite, together with limestone, had been discovered in advantageous proximity to the coal, making a bright outlook for the Sound region in general in connection with its railroad hopes, its unrivaled timber resources, and its far-reaching geographical relations.

After spending a few weeks in the Puget Sound with a friend from San Francisco, we engaged passage on the little mail steamer California, at Portland, Oregon, for Alaska. The sail down the broad lower reaches of the Columbia and across its foamy bar, around Cape Flattery, and up the Juan

de Fuca Strait, was delightful; and after calling again at Victoria and Port Townsend we got fairly off for icy Alaska.

# **Chapter II**

## **Alexander Archipelago and the Home I found in Alaska**

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To the lover of pure wildness Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world. No excursion that I know of may be made into any other American wilderness where so marvelous an abundance of noble, newborn scenery is so charmingly brought to view as on the trip through the Alexander Archipelago to Fort Wrangell and Sitka. Gazing from the deck of the steamer, one is borne smoothly over calm blue waters, through the midst of countless forest-clad islands. The ordinary discomforts of a sea voyage are not felt, for nearly all the whole long way is on inland waters that are about as waveless as rivers and lakes. So numerous are the islands that they seem to have been sown broadcast; long tapering vistas between the largest of them open in every direction.

Day after day in the fine weather we enjoyed, we seemed to float in true fairyland, each succeeding view seeming more and more beautiful, the one we chanced to have before us the most surprisingly beautiful of all. Never before this had I been embosomed in scenery so hopelessly beyond description. To sketch picturesque bits, definitely bounded, is comparatively easy--a lake in the woods, a glacier meadow, or a cascade in its dell; or even a grand master view of mountains beheld from some commanding outlook after climbing from height to height above the forests. These may be attempted, and more or less telling pictures made of them; but in these coast landscapes there is such indefinite, on-leading expansiveness, such a

multitude of features without apparent redundance, their lines graduating delicately into one another in endless succession, while the whole is so fine, so tender, so ethereal, that all pen-work seems hopelessly unavailing. Tracing shining ways through fiord and sound, past forests and waterfalls, islands and mountains and far azure headlands, it seems as if surely we must at length reach the very paradise of the poets, the abode of the blessed.



Some idea of the wealth of this scenery may be gained from the fact that the coast-line of Alaska is about twenty-six thousand miles long, more than twice as long as all the rest of the United States. The islands of the Alexander Archipelago, with the straits, channels, canals, sounds, passages, and fiords, form an intricate web of land and water embroidery sixty or seventy miles wide, fringing the lofty icy chain of coast mountains from Puget Sound to Cook Inlet; and, with infinite variety, the general pattern is harmonious throughout its whole extent of nearly a thousand miles. Here you glide into a narrow channel hemmed in by mountain walls, forested down to the water's edge, where there is no distant view, and your attention is concentrated on the objects close about you--the crowded spires of the spruces and hemlocks rising higher and higher on the steep green slopes; stripes of paler green where winter avalanches have cleared away the trees, allowing grasses and willows to spring up; zigzags of cascades appearing and disappearing among the bushes and trees;

short, steep glens with brawling streams hidden beneath alder and dogwood, seen only where they emerge on the brown algæ of the shore; and retreating hollows, with lingering snow-banks marking the fountains of ancient glaciers. The steamer is often so near the shore that you may distinctly see the cones clustered on the tops of the trees, and the ferns and bushes 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 on either hand by headlands in charming array, one dipping gracefully beyond another and growing fainter and more ethereal in the distance. The tranquil channel stretching river-like between, may be stirred here and there by the silvery plashing of upspringing salmon, or by flocks of white gulls floating like water-lilies among the sun spangles; while mellow, tempered sunshine is streaming over all, blending sky, land, and water in pale, misty blue. Then, while you are dreamily gazing into the depths of this leafy ocean lane, the little steamer, seeming hardly larger than a duck, turning into some passage not visible until the moment of entering it, glides into a wide expanse--a sound filled with islands, sprinkled and clustered in forms and compositions such as nature alone can invent; some of them 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 bare rocks just above the water, mere dots punctuating grand, outswelling sentences of islands.

The variety we find, both as to the contours and the collocation of the islands, is due chiefly to differences in the structure and composition of their rocks, and the unequal glacial denudation different portions of the coast were subjected to. This influence must have been especially heavy toward the end of the glacial period, when the main ice-sheet began to break up into separate glaciers.

Moreover, the mountains of the larger islands nourished local glaciers, some of them of considerable size, which sculptured their summits and sides, forming in some cases wide cirques with cañons or valleys leading down from them into the channels and sounds. These causes have produced much of the bewildering 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 main ice-mantle from the mountains of the Coast Range, more or less varied by subordinate foothill ridges and mountains. 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 appearance produced by the over-sweeping ice-flood during the period of greatest glacial abundance.

The canals, channels, straits, passages, sounds, etc., are subordinate to the same glacial conditions in their forms, trends, and extent as those which determined the forms, trends, and distribution of the land-masses, their basins being the parts of the pre-glacial margin of the continent, eroded to varying depths below sea-level, and into which, of course, the ocean waters flowed as the ice was melted out of them. Had the general glacial denudation been much less, these ocean ways over which we are sailing would have been valleys and cañons and lakes; and the islands rounded hills and ridges, landscapes with undulating features like those found above sea-level wherever the rocks and glacial conditions are similar. In general, the 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 streams, and the luxuriant foliage of the out-leaning trees on the shores make this resemblance all the more complete. The largest islands look like part of the mainland in any view to be had of them from the ship, but far the greater number

are small, and appreciable as islands, scores of them being less than a mile long. These the eye easily takes in and revels in their beauty with ever fresh delight. In their relations to each other the individual members of a group have evidently been derived from the same general rock-mass, yet they never seem broken or abridged in any way as to their contour lines, however abruptly they may dip their sides. Viewed one by one, they seem detached beauties, like extracts from a poem, while, from the completeness of their lines and the way that their trees are arranged, each seems a finished stanza in itself. Contemplating the arrangement of the trees on these small islands, a distinct impression is produced of their having been sorted and harmonized as to size like a well-balanced bouquet. On some of the smaller tufted islets a group of tapering spruces is 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 sides, like flowers leaning outward against the rim of a vase. These harmonious tree relations are so constant that they evidently are the result of design, as much so as the arrangement of the feathers of birds or the scales of fishes.

Thus perfectly beautiful are these blessed evergreen islands, and their beauty is the beauty of youth, for though the freshness of their verdure must be ascribed to the bland moisture with which they are bathed from warm ocean-currents, the very existence of the islands, their features, finish, and peculiar distribution, are all immediately referable to ice-action during the great glacial winter just now drawing to a close.



We arrived at Wrangell July 14, and after a short stop of a few hours went on to Sitka and returned on the 20th to Wrangell, the most inhospitable place at first sight I had ever seen. The little steamer that had been my home in the wonderful trip through the archipelago, after taking the mail, departed on her return to Portland, and as I watched her gliding out of sight in the dismal blurring rain, I felt strangely lonesome. The friend that had accompanied me thus far now left for his home in San Francisco, with two other interesting travelers who had made the trip for health and scenery, while my fellow passengers, the missionaries, went direct to the Presbyterian home in the old fort. There was nothing like a tavern or lodging-house in the village, nor could I find any place in the stumpy, rocky, boggy ground about it that looked dry enough to camp on until I could find a way into the wilderness to begin my studies. Every place within a mile or two of the town seemed strangely shelterless and inhospitable, for all the trees had long ago been felled for building-timber and firewood. At the worst, I thought, I could build a bark hut on a hill back of the village, where something like a forest loomed dimly through the draggled clouds.

I had already seen some of the high glacier-bearing mountains in distant views from the steamer, and was anxious to reach them. A few whites of the village, with whom I entered into conversation, warned me that the Indians were a bad lot, not to be trusted, that the woods



were well-nigh impenetrable, and that I could go nowhere without a canoe. On the other hand, these natural difficulties made the grand wild country all the more attractive, and I determined to get into the heart of it somehow or other with a bag of hardtack, trusting to my usual good luck. My present difficulty was in finding a first base camp. My only hope was on the hill. When I was strolling past the old fort I happened to meet one of the missionaries, who kindly asked me where I was going to take up my quarters.

"I don't know," I replied. "I have not been able to find quarters of any sort. The top of that little hill over there seems the only possible place."

He then explained that every room in the mission house was full, but he thought I might obtain leave to spread my blanket in a carpenter-shop belonging to the mission. Thanking him, I ran down to the sloppy wharf for my little bundle of baggage, laid it on the shop floor, and felt glad and snug among the dry, sweet-smelling shavings.

The carpenter was at work on a new Presbyterian mission building, and when he came in I explained that Dr. Jackson [Dr. Sheldon Jackson, 1834-1909, became Superintendent of Presbyterian Missions in Alaska in 1877, and United States General Agent of Education in 1885. [W. F. B.]] had suggested that I might be allowed to sleep on the floor, and after I assured him that I would not touch his tools or be in his way, he goodnaturedly gave me the freedom of the shop and also of his small private side room where I would find a wash-basin.

I was here only one night, however, for Mr. Vanderbilt, a merchant, who with his family occupied the best house in the fort, hearing that one of the late arrivals, whose business none seemed to know, was compelled to sleep in the carpenter-shop, paid me a good-Samaritan visit and after a few explanatory words on my glacier and forest studies, with fine hospitality offered me a room and a place

at his table. Here I found a real home, with freedom to go on all sorts of excursions as opportunity offered. Annie Vanderbilt, a little doctor of divinity two years old, ruled the household with love sermons and kept it warm.

Mr. Vanderbilt introduced me to prospectors and traders and some of the most influential of the Indians. I visited the mission school and the home for Indian girls kept by Mrs. MacFarland, and made short excursions to the nearby forests and streams, and studied the rate of growth of the different species of trees and their age, counting the annual rings on stumps in the large clearings made by the military when the fort was occupied, causing wondering speculation among the Wrangell folk, as was reported by Mr. Vanderbilt.

“What can the fellow be up to?” they inquired. “He seems to spend most of his time among stumps and weeds. I saw him the other day on his knees, looking at a stump as if he expected to find gold in it. He seems to have no serious object whatever.”

One night when a heavy rainstorm was blowing I unwittingly caused a lot of wondering excitement among the whites as well as the superstitious Indians. Being anxious to see how the Alaska trees behave in storms and hear the songs they sing, I stole quietly away through the gray drenching blast to the hill back of the town, without being observed. Night was falling when I set out and it was pitch dark when I reached the top. The glad, rejoicing storm in glorious voice was singing through the woods, noble compensation for mere body discomfort. But I wanted a fire, a big one, to see as well as hear how the storm and trees were behaving. After long, patient groping I found a little dry punk in a hollow trunk and carefully stored it beside my matchbox and an inch or two of candle in an inside pocket that the rain had not yet reached; then, wiping some dead twigs and whittling them into thin shavings, stored them with the punk. I then made a little conical bark hut about a foot high, and, carefully leaning over it and sheltering it as

much as possible from the driving rain, I wiped and stored a lot of dead twigs, lighted the candle, and set it in the hut, carefully added pinches of punk and shavings, and at length got a little blaze, by the light of which I gradually added larger shavings, then twigs all set on end astride the inner flame, making the little hut higher and wider. Soon I had light enough to enable me to select the best dead branches and large sections of bark, which were set on end, gradually increasing the height and corresponding light of the hut fire. A considerable area was thus well lighted, from which I gathered abundance of wood, and kept adding to the fire until it had a strong, hot heart and sent up a pillar of flame thirty or forty feet high, illuminating a wide circle in spite of the rain, and casting a red glare into the flying clouds. Of all the thousands of camp-fires I have elsewhere built none was just like this one, rejoicing in triumphant strength and beauty in the heart of the rain-laden gale. It was wonderful,-the illumined rain and clouds mingled together and the trees glowing against the jet background, the colors of the mossy, lichened trunks with sparkling streams pouring down the furrows of the bark, and the gray-bearded old patriarchs bowing low and chanting in passionate worship!

My fire was in all its glory about midnight, and, having made a bark shed to shelter me from the rain and partially dry my clothing, I had nothing to do but look and listen and join the trees in their hymns and prayers.

Neither the great white heart of the fire nor the quivering enthusiastic flames shooting aloft like auroral lances could be seen from the village on account of the trees in front of it and its being back a little way over the brow of the hill; but the light in the clouds made a great show, a portentous sign in the stormy heavens unlike anything ever before seen or heard of in Wrangell. Some wakeful Indians, happening to see it about midnight, in great alarm aroused the Collector of Customs and begged him to go to the missionaries and get them to pray away the frightful omen, and inquired

anxiously whether white men had ever seen anything like that sky-fire, which instead of being quenched by the rain was burning brighter and brighter. The Collector said he had heard of such strange fires, and this one he thought might perhaps be what the white man called a "volcano, or an *ignis fatuus*." When Mr. Young was called from his bed to pray, he, too, confoundedly astonished and at a loss for any sort of explanation, confessed that he had never seen anything like it in the sky or anywhere else in such cold wet weather, but that it was probably some sort of spontaneous combustion "that the white man called St. Elmo's fire, or Will-of-the-wisp." These explanations, though not convincingly clear, perhaps served to veil their own astonishment and in some measure to diminish the superstitious fears of the natives; but from what I heard, the few whites who happened to see the strange light wondered about as wildly as the Indians.

I have enjoyed thousands of camp-fires in all sorts of weather and places, warm-hearted, short-flamed, friendly little beauties glowing in the dark on open spots in high Sierra gardens, daisies and lilies circled about them, gazing like enchanted children; and large fires in silver fir forests, with spires of flame towering like the trees about them, and sending up multitudes of starry sparks to enrich the sky; and still greater fires on the mountains in winter, changing camp climate to summer, and making the frosty snow look like beds of white flowers, and oftentimes mingling their swarms of swift-flying sparks with falling snow-crystals when the clouds were in bloom. But this Wrangell camp-fire, my first in Alaska, I shall always remember for its triumphant storm-defying grandeur, and the wondrous beauty of the psalm-singing, lichen-painted trees which it brought to light.

# Chapter III

## Wrangell Island and Alaska Summers

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Wrangell Island is about fourteen miles long, separated from the mainland by a narrow channel or fiord, and trending in the direction of the flow of the ancient ice-sheet. Like all its neighbors, it is densely forested down to the water's edge with trees that never seem to have suffered from thirst or fire or the axe of the lumberman in all their long century lives. Beneath soft, shady clouds, with abundance of rain, they flourish in wonderful strength and beauty to a good old age, while the many warm days, half cloudy, half clear, and the little groups of pure sun-days enable them to ripen their cones and send myriads of seeds flying every autumn to insure the permanence of the forests and feed the multitude of animals.

The Wrangell village was a rough place. No mining hamlet in the placer gulches of California, nor any backwoods village I ever saw, approached it in picturesque, devil-may-care *abandon*. It was a lawless drangle of wooden huts and houses, built in crooked lines, wrangling around the boggy shore of the island for a mile or so in the general form of the letter S, without the slightest subordination to the points of the compass or to building laws of any kind. Stumps and logs, like precious monuments, adorned its two streets, each stump and log, on account of the moist climate, moss-grown and tufted with grass and bushes, but muddy on the sides below the limit of the bog-line. The ground in general was an oozy, mossy bog on a foundation of jagged rocks, full of concealed pit-holes. These picturesque rock, bog, and stump obstructions, however, were not so very much in the way, for there were no wagons

or carriages there. There was not a horse on the island. The domestic animals were represented by chickens, a lonely cow, a few sheep, and hogs of a breed well calculated to deepen and complicate the mud of the streets.

Most of the permanent residents of Wrangell were engaged in trade. Some little trade was carried on in fish and furs, but most of the quickening business of the place was derived from the Cassiar gold-mines, some two hundred and fifty or three hundred miles inland, by way of the Stickeen River and Dease Lake. Two stern-wheel steamers plied on the river between Wrangell and Telegraph Creek at the head of navigation, a hundred and fifty miles from Wrangell, carrying freight and passengers and connecting with pack-trains for the mines. These placer mines, on tributaries of the Mackenzie River, were discovered in the year 1874. About eighteen hundred miners and prospectors were said to have passed through Wrangell that season of 1879, about half of them being Chinamen. Nearly a third of this whole number set out from here in the month of February, traveling on the Stickeen River, which usually remains safely frozen until toward the end of April. The main body of the miners, however, went up on the steamers in May and June. On account of the severe winters they were all compelled to leave the mines the end of September. Perhaps about two thirds of them passed the winter in Portland and Victoria and the towns of Puget Sound. The rest remained here in Wrangell, dozing away the long winter as best they could.

Indians, mostly of the Stickeen tribe, occupied the two ends of the town, the whites, of whom there were about forty or fifty, the middle portion; but there was no determinate line of demarcation, the dwellings of the Indians being mostly as large and solidly built of logs and planks as those of the whites. Some of them were adorned with tall totem poles.