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Lincoln, Nebraska

Wednesday's Letter

Alaskan Impressions.

On deck I steadied myself at the door and looked over to the north. There in the gray bank was a line that was not the edge of a cloud. Then I crossed over between the compass and the wheel to the lee side and looked. There is something disappointing about the first sight of land—the eyes are not satisfied, so slight a thing is the wavering line that tells of hills and valleys. But in an hour the coast was well developed all along our right, with the wind blowing from just the direction we wanted to sail. So the order went forth to "tack ship," and when the dark horizons narrowed into night we were sailing to the southwest, away from the dangerous reefs and tides of the Trinity Islands.

The morning broke clear, with a light wind. Behind us lay a long, low strip of land rising at one end into a cliff. This is Chirikoff Island. It has a dull gray-brown bare look, and the sailors tell tales of uncanny relics of its Russian penal colony. 'As Chirikoff grew smaller at the south there began to appear one after another the snow-covered mountains of the Alaska peninsula. The intense inky blue of the open sea was slightly faded here and the long smooth deep swells were gone. But the horizon at the north was surely one of Nature's masterpieces in mountain scenery. A line of mountains and glaciers, covered with snow only at the highest points, and for foreground the ocean. About it there was an atmosphere which gave a purity and delicacy of coloring which I never expect to see excelled.

All that day, and all the next, and most of another we sailed with practically no headway because we were bound up the straits and the wind was blowing down.

It was late in the afternoon and our staunch old bark was heeled well over and diving into the short seas so that the fore-castle was soaked with spray, when I got my first view of Kadiak Island. There were no lofty snow capped mountains, but the look of the island was as though it had been a low plain and on it had been thickly set small, steep hills. In the morning a light breeze was carrying us steadily up Shellkoff Strait with the magnificent mainland mountains on one side and the Kadiak hills on the other.

The mainland shows a rough dark coast with here and there a snow white mountain. One of these is a group of such tall and slender columns that it is known as the Call Building, in honor of San Francisco's celebrated skyscraper. On the Kadiak Island side the coast begins to look almost hospitable. Near the shore a few jagged rocks project over the water. But the hills, while steep, are smooth, and as fair a valley as one might wish to see stretches back between them. It has its own meandering river and tide water lagoon. September has still left a good deal of green and the sight of it brings the question, "Where are the farms?" And why not? They tell me this is Sturgeon river, where many dog salmon and humpbacks (both white salmon) run, but not many red salmon. It does not head in a lake. And just beyond that mountain is Karluk diver. On the map it is marked Cape Karluk, but here we call it Karluk head. One of the finest of the Kadiak hills, it faces the sea with a clean front of checkered gray and varicolored granite. It is Nature's northwest corner monument for Kadiak Island.

Soon we are straining our eyes to see through the morning mist down in the bight between the hills. What will the place look like, what ships are in the harbor, what news will there be?

Now the fog has cleared a little, and there is the Santa Clara at anchor, her sails snugly stowed, a full rigged ship. And there is Karluk. On rising ground just back of the rest of the town is the church, bright in its coat of clean, white paint. A building here and there a little above the water line seems to be all there is to the town. The smell of cooking salmon comes out to us; at first faint and not entirely unlike the odor from that choicest of all canned meats, Karluk red salmon. One or two steam launches soon came alongside and a number of men came on board to welcome the ship and share the captain's cheer. After much pulling and rattling of heavy chains at the bow, we are fast to the mooring and have a good length of anchor chain out. In front of us lies Karluk Spit, a narrow bank of gravel, on which the cannery men have put most of their buildings—a shack here, a small house there, yonder a cannery, and yet farther off a warehouse—all located just as necessity and convenience dictated. Formerly some half dozen independent canneries were built, but now only two are operated, and these by one company. The mist and rains of summer, the north-east gales and the frozen spray from the northwest have given a uniform faded look to hastily and cheaply-made buildings. A one-story house about the center of the village, and a little more prominent than the rest by virtue of a coat of light colored paint and the fact that the gable looks out to sea, has a flag pole, and the flag is up. This is the company's "office."

The tell me great things of this little strip of beach. It is the largest single fishing station in the world, at least for red salmon. There is no small river in Alaska that can compare with the Karluk river for number of fish or the regularity with which they come. The canneries of Karluk have already produced more than the purchase price of Alaska.

To the right a little ways lies the native village. There are some old dories and small boats made fast along the beach, and just back from the shore are a number of slender poles and discarded water pipes, supported with posts something after the fashion of country-town hitching places. On these poles the salmon is hung to dry without salt or smoke, and literally in the rain. The flesh of the salmon is stripped from each side of the backbone, from the head to near the tail, and the backbone cut off, leaving two strips of meat still joined by the tail. These double strips, red on one side and silver on the other, broader than a man's hand, and over a foot long, make a striking object when hung in long rows. This is the Yukala which the Alents have taught their children to make for winter provision since the

(Continued on page 4.)

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