

SITKA, ALASKA.

THE season is now rapidly approaching when the tourist's eyes will turn in the direction of our extreme northern possessions. Alaska, which has stood for years in the popular mind as the personification of frigidity, is becoming better known every year. Annually steamer loads of tourists are carried through the enchanting island-fringed channel which leads northward five hundred miles from Puget Sound. Exempt from ocean storms and their invariable attendant, seasickness, the traveler sails continually on the bosom of placid waters, with grand forest and mountain scenery on either hand. It is such a voyage as one would enjoy were there a broad, deep and continuous waterway across the Cascades and Rocky Mountains, such as the early navigators sought in vain for more than two centuries. A glance at the map will show what a perfect maze of bays, inlets and land-locked passages is to be found on the coast of British Columbia and Alaska. Sitka, the tourist's objective point, lies in latitude 58 deg., on one of a numerous archipelago of islands, being no further north than the extreme southern point of Greenland. Yet what a contrast in climate between that icy land where the hardy Norsemen planted colonies nine hundred years ago and that of "Sitka's thousand isles"! Owing to the modifying influence of the great current of warm water which sweeps through the North Pacific, the mean winter temperature at Sitka varies from 27 to 34 degrees, and the yearly mean from 38 to 48 degrees. The lowest recorded temperature during thirteen years of observation was 7 degrees below zero. Snow seldom falls to the depth of six inches, and generally disappears rapidly before the melting rains. The rainfall is very great, to which cause is due the luxuriant growth of native grasses and the dense forests that cover the islands and fringe the coast of the mainland. Tall, jagged peaks, barren of vegetation and covered with snow, but having at their bases the deep green of luxuriant vegetation, are the leading characteristics of the scenery along the Alaskan coast. Numerous large glaciers thrust their icy whiteness through the mountain passes and move steadily into the sea. An occasional iceberg may be seen in the vicinity of these, consisting of huge masses of ice which have become detached and fallen into the water, where they float about till they melt and disappear.

Sitka is the chief town and seat of government, the only other place of importance being Fort Wrangell, still further to the south. It was founded by Baranoff in 1799 and was made the capital of Russian America by Baron Wrangell in 1832, consequently it is one of the oldest settlements on the Pacific Coast north of Mexico. There is much in the old Russian town which is of interest to tourists, and it is a fitting terminus for so delightful a voyage.

This region is also closely associated in the popular mind with sealskin sacques, or "Alaska comforters." The seal islands of St. Paul and St. George, the only place where seals may be legally taken, and where the Alaska Commercial Company has the monopoly privilege of cap-

turing 100,000 annually, lie several hundred miles to the northwest of Sitka and beyond the limits of tourist travel. Sealing is carried on by many private individuals in defiance of the law, and the risk they run of fine and confiscation of property is not very great in a region a thousand miles in extent, guarded by only one Government vessel. The number of seals killed annually cannot be definitely stated, for, in addition to these poachers, it is to be presumed that the monopoly does not confine itself to the legal 100,000. They are situated much as were the Tweed ring in New York—they "do the counting," and it makes little difference what any one else may say or do.

There is another amphibious animal that abounds in Alaskan waters, which plays a far more important part in the domestic economy of the natives than does the seal. This is the walrus, the mainstay of the Innuit, that branch of the Esquimaux race living along the western and northern shores of the Alaska Peninsula. The walrus is as essential to the Inuit as the camel to the Arab or the cocoa-palm to the native of the South Sea Islands. Its flesh feeds him; its oil illuminates and warms his dark and contracted hut; its sinews make his bird nets; its tough skin is put to many uses, and when skillfully stretched over a light wooden frame forms the famous kayak, in which he boldly ventures on the stormiest sea; its intestines are converted into waterproof clothing; the soles of its flippers make soles for his feet; and, finally, its ivory is of great utility in endless ways, and forms a valuable article of barter with visiting traders. The provident Inuit makes a cache of walrus meat in the fall, and this often becomes his sole food supply for weeks at a time during the severest portion of winter, when the procuring of fresh food is an impossibility even to those hardy natives. It is no wonder the Inuit conceives Paradise to be one vast walrus hunting ground, and says to himself, "Without walrus there is no heaven."

The sandy shoals of Bristol Bay, in Behring Sea, are the favorite resort of the walrus. When the ice pack closes the sea above Asia and America, millions of these animals retreat from their summer resort among the ice-floes of the Arctic Ocean into the open waters of Behring Sea, accompanied by their young which were born on the floating ice of the Arctic. There they spend the winter, scattered in herds ranging from a dozen to several thousand in each. Living at peace among themselves and nearly exempt from persecution by hunters, they pass the dark winter months with as much enjoyment as such a mass of fat can expect to experience. In the summer time they are hunted by the natives, and are shot by thousands by the whalers who visit the Arctic by way of Behring's Strait, their oil and ivory constituting an important item in the return cargo of the whaling fleet.

A YOUNG man in Massachusetts has adopted whistling for a profession. When he gets married, and the bills begin to come in, he will have plenty of chance for practice.