

THE RUSSIANS AT BODEGA AND FORT ROSS.

IN January, 1811, there arrived in the quiet waters of Bodega Bay a strange-looking craft bearing a burden of human freight. They were men with unkempt hair and shaggy beards, with frames of iron and a physique that told of their being inured to a life of excessive toil and exposure to the rigors of an inclement climate. To them, as they entered the beautiful cove on that midwinter's day, the surrounding country seemed a veritable paradise. Accustomed as they had been all their lives to see naught but the deep snow lying over the face of the earth at this season of the year, the sight of the vernal hills glowing in the bright sunshine placed before them a picture, the most lovely that had ever greeted their gaze. These brawny strangers were Russians, and had come from Sitka for the purpose of establishing a military post and a rendezvous for a band of trappers, also proposing to farm extensively, using their products for supplying the colonies in the far north. The number of men was seventy—twenty Russians and fifty Kodiak Indians—under the leadership of Alexander Koskoff, a man with a wooden leg, and to whom on this account the native Californians applied the nickname of "Pie de Palo." To Bodega Bay they gave the name of "Romanzoff," and the stream now known as Russian River they called "Slavianka."

Knowing full well that they had no just title or claim to the land, they framed a pretext for landing there by stating they had been refused a supply of fresh water at Yerba Buena (San Francisco), to strengthen which they asserted that they had purchased all the land lying adjacent to the bay from the aborigines, a claim which was ultimately extended until it covered all the land lying between Point Reyes and Point Arena, and for a distance of nine miles inland. As a matter of fact the Russians could not purchase any of this land from the Indians, for at that time the entire country of the Alta Californias belonged to Spain; therefore it has been truly remarked of them that as they came without invitation, and occupied the land without the permission of the owners, they may, with every justice, be called the first "squatters" in California. They went to work with a will, however, whether they had any right to the soil or not. They proceeded into the interior of the country, about six miles from the bay, and there founded a settlement; houses were built, fields fenced and agricultural pursuits prosecuted with energy.

As soon as the first crop had matured and was ready for shipment, it became necessary that they should have a warehouse at the bay where their vessels could load. Accordingly a building for this purpose was erected. It was very strong and durable, and would probably be standing now but for the fact that a land-slide swept the most of it into the bay some years ago. There was another building near the one just mentioned which was used in later years by the first American settlers as a kind of boarding house, but it is only from mention of the fact that its existence has been learned.

It is not possible to give the exact original number of

their houses in this locality, owing to these having been all demolished and not a vestige remaining of them to tell their story, but it is undoubted that there were a considerable number. These buildings were small and rough, the boards being hewn from redwood logs. They were each strong enough for a fortress, and were probably built to serve the double purpose of shelter from storms and protection from an enemy.

When Koskoff and his company established themselves at Bodega he found most strenuous opposition from the Spanish authorities of California, who looked upon them as interlopers, and were ever ready to embrace any and all opportunities to drive them off. Open warfare was threatened, and the Russians had every reason to believe that the threats would be carried out. There was another enemy to ward against—the Indians—over whom the Spaniards, through the missions, had absolute control, and it was apprehended that this power might be used. Several expeditions were organized by the Dons to march against the Muscovites, though they all came to naught. The Russians would doubtless have been very well satisfied to have let the Spaniards alone if they would have reciprocated the courtesy; fearing, however, to trust them, the new-comers sought for a location which would afford them natural protection from the foe. Passing up the coast thirty miles, they came to the level and extensive tract lying adjacent to the present Fort Ross. Here they found everything they could desire. Vast meadows stretched to the eastward, affording pasture to flocks without number. There stood

The forest primeval; the murmuring pines and the hemlock,
Bearded with moss and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight.

There was a beautiful little cove in which vessels might lie in safety from the fury of the northern storms; near at hand was an ample stretch of beach, on which their staunch though crude argosies could be constructed and easily launched upon the mighty deep; no more propitious place could have been found along the entire coast. The location once chosen, they set to work with a will to prepare their new homes. A site was chosen for the stockade near the ocean's shore, and in such a position as to protect their vessels lying in the little harbor from those inimical to them. The construction of this fortification is interesting. The plat of ground enclosing it was a parallelogram, 285 feet wide and 312 long, and containing about two acres. The angles were placed very nearly upon the cardinal points of the compass. At the north and south angles there were constructed an octagonal redoubt, two stories high, and mounted with six pieces of artillery. These were built exactly alike and were about twenty-four feet in diameter. The walls were formed of hewed redwood logs, carefully mortised together at the corners, and were about eight inches in thickness. The roof was conical and had a small flag-staff at the apex. The stockade approached the towers in such a way that one-half of them was within the enclosure and the other half outside it. The entrance to them was through small doors on the inside, there being embrasures both inside and out, arranged so as to protect