

Scarcely a century ago fur seals existed in numbers which appear now almost incredible on many coasts and islands of the Southern Ocean, Juan Fernandez, Chili, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, South Shetland, Prince Edward Island, the Crozettes, some parts of Australia, Antipodes Island, and many more, mostly within our dominions or within British influence, all possessed "rookeries," or breeding places of seals, which, if protected, might have been still as populous and valuable as those on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. Every one of these, however, has, owing to the ruthless and indiscriminate slaughter carried on by ignorant and lawless sealers, regardless of everything but immediate profit, been totally annihilated, or so reduced in numbers that it is no longer worth while to visit them. The only spot in the world where fur seals are now found in their original, or even increased, numbers is the Pribilof group, a circumstance entirely owing to the rigid enforcement of the wise regulations of the Alaskan Commercial Company, which are based on a thorough knowledge of the habits of the animals. But for this the fur seal might before now have been added to the long list of animals exterminated from the earth by the hand of man.

Of course it is not my province to enter into the question of the recent alleged illegal or high-handed proceedings of the Alaskan authorities or the wrongs of the Canadian fishermen, so graphically described by Mr. Staveley Hill. They may be safely left in Lord Salisbury's hands; but if they have been such as to call the serious attention of both governments concerned to the necessity of coming to a definite understanding for the future protection of the seals, not only in the islands, but throughout the whole region of their migrations, these events will not have been without their use. The fact that the interests of the seals are also in the long run the interests of those who capture and destroy them has, unfortunately, not saved them from destruction elsewhere; but it is to be hoped that this sad history will not be lost sight of in dealing with them in their one remaining stronghold.

I am, your obedient servant,

W. H. FLOWER.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM,
Cromwell Road, S. W., November 30.

Mr. Lincoln to Mr. Blaine.

No. 394.]

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
London, January 24, 1891. (Received February 4.)

SIR: I have the honor to inclose herewith, for your information, a cutting from to-day's Times, reporting an answer, in the House of Commons yesterday, of Sir James Fergusson to a question asked by Prof. Bryce as to the present status of the Behring Sea question.

I have, etc.,

ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

[From the London Times, January 24, 1891.]

THE BERING SEA FISHERIES.

Mr. Bryce asked the under-secretary for foreign affairs whether he could give the House any information regarding the present position of the negotiations between Her Majesty and the Government of the United States of America regarding the seal fisheries in Bering Sea; whether, in particular, he could state what was the nature of the proceedings reported to have been recently taken in the Supreme Court of the United States in connection with the seizure of a sealing vessel which was sailing under the British flag; and when it was intended to present to Parliament papers relating to this subject.

Sir J. Fergusson. Negotiations regarding the seal fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean are proceeding in ordinary diplomatic course. A long note was addressed by the United States Government to Her Majesty's minister at Washington on the 17th of December, to which a reply has not yet been made. The proceedings taken in the Supreme Court of the United States are a motion for a writ of prohibition to the district court of Alaska in respect of alleged excess of jurisdiction by that court in condemning a Canadian vessel which was engaged in seal fishery in the open sea.

S. Ex. 55—7