

Oct. 1866

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From Vancouver Island to the Mound Prairies.

In Vancouver Island June is to my mind by far the most enjoyable month of the twelve; the miserable sloppy transition state, filling the gap, as it were, betwixt winter and summer has gone, and in its place we have clear sky, bright sunshine, dry ground, and gay flowers, whilst everywhere one's ears are greeted with the hum and buzz of insects and the cheery songs of birds. Soon after daylight on one of these lovely summer mornings, now some four years ago, I was on board a small steamer, named the Otter, belonging to the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company.

It is not a long and perilous voyage we are going to undertake, but simply a pleasure trip across the Straits of Georgia, first to reach the entrance to Puget Sound, and thence to steam up this singular inland canal, in order to land at Nisqually, a large district of country so named by the Indians, and at this time in the occupation of and farmed by the Puget Sound Company.

Victoria Harbour—round which is built the town of Victoria, the capital of Vancouver Island—is by no means an easy place for a vessel of large tonnage to enter, but when once she has been steered safely past the rocks intersecting its entrance, the harbour is far from objectionable. Bad as getting into it is, getting out again is ten times worse. The passage is shoal, and intricate as a labyrinth; and should the wind blow from S.E. or S.W., the sea comes tumbling in as if seeking safety in the rock-bound harbour from the rough usage of old Eolus outside. It is true there are buoys to mark the way between the rocks, which run out beneath the sea from Ogden Point on the one side, to M'Lauchlin on the other, still, for all this, the navigation is not easy, even to the experienced.

In the absence of all the bustle and confusion which usually precede the departure of a steamer from a pier, it seemed to me that everything was uncomfortably quiet on this particular June morning. But few sounds were audible; the drowsy town was, at so early an hour, hushed in sleep; the water, smooth as polished metal, scarcely murmured its ripple song, as gently flowing over the beach it trickled lazily back again betwixt the shining pebbles. A small flock of "herring gulls" floating near us did not even quarrel on this occasion, —a most unusual event when there are more than two together—but drifted by, silent as all about them. The few blinking, red-eyed