

blue, and, in the foreground, a fleet of very graceful canoes, filled with naked or half-naked Indians, completed the illusion. A line of surf seemed to bar every approach to the town, but suddenly a narrow channel opened. The ship swung sharply to the right and glided into a long, narrow harbor. The Indian village is built upon the beach, and at evening it was covered by the shadow of the adjoining forest. The green spire on the belfry of the Greek church reached up above everything except the former Russian governor's "castle," a huge log structure perched upon a pinnacle of rock near the sea. The church on the lower ground was surrounded by the rambling, dilapidated houses and hovels of the Russian inhabitants, who then numbered about four hundred, their neighbors being two hundred mixed whites and about twelve hundred Sitka Indians. Sitka was abandoned as a military station shortly after our arrival, since which time several efforts have been made to induce Congress to organize some sort of government there.

When we landed at Sitka we forced our way through a crowd of Indians, Russians, half-breeds, Jews, and soldiers, to whom this monthly arrival is life itself, and went directly to the trading-store and post-office. Mr. C. H. Taylor, of Chicago, who supported the expedition, had written to engage Phillips's fur-trading schooner to take us to Yakutat, where we were to begin our exploration. This schooner was the only craft available for rough work in the ice-drifts, so it was with much anxiety that we asked:

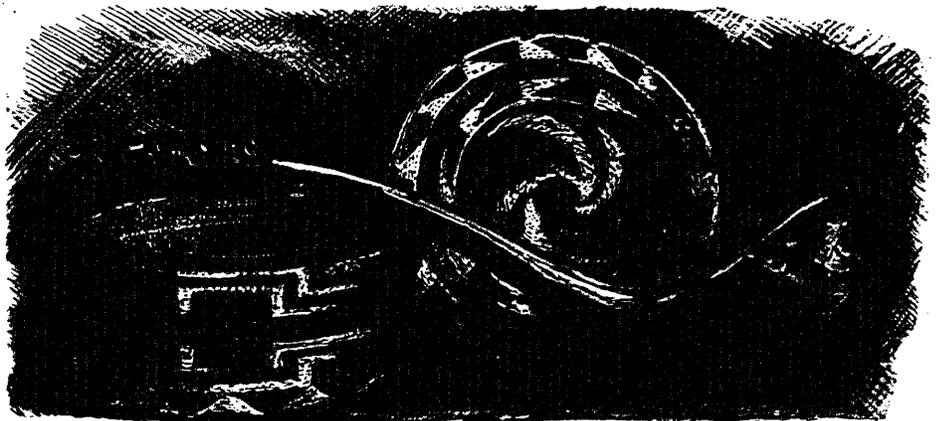
"Where is your schooner?"

"Gone to Behring's Bay for a load of furs," was the disappointing answer.

After fruitless efforts to obtain something better, we decided to risk ourselves in one of the

large Indian canoes. The Alaskans, having a superfluity of time on their hands, devote long periods to the most trifling transactions, and, in important bargains, it takes days, and sometimes weeks, to reach an agreement. We found them grasping, shrewd, and unscrupulous.

It was April 16th when we first asked for a large war canoe, or *yahk* (a word which would seem to be related to the yacht of the Germanic tongue), with crew. We negotiated with several of the chiefs, sub-chiefs, and principal men who owned the canoes and slaves to man them. But after wearing ourselves out chaffering with them, we found we could save time by taking the experienced Phillips's advice to "let'm alone." By and by, these aboriginal land-sharks began to offer terms. The winter and spring drizzle set in, and we joined the group of loungers around the trader's stove. We visited "Sitka Jack," an arrant old scoundrel, but one of the wealthiest men of the Sitka tribe. Of course his house stood among the largest, at the fashionable end of the town. These houses were built of planks, three or four inches thick, each one having been hewed from a log, with an adze formed by lashing a metal blade to the short prong of a forked stick. In constructing the native cabin, the planks are set on edge and so nicely fitted that they need no chinking. The shape of the house is square; a bark roof is laid on, with a central aperture for chimney. The door is a circular opening about two feet in diameter. It is closed with a sheet of bark or a bear-skin or seal-skin. On arriving at Sitka Jack's hut we crawled through the door, and found ourselves in the presence of Jack's wives, children, and slaves, who were lounging on robes and blankets laid on a board flooring which extended along



THLINKIT COVERED BASKET AND SPOON. (CHILKÁHT KWÁHN.)