

DOWN THE YUKON AND UP THE MAGKENZIE.

3,200 Miles by Foot and Paddle.

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.....The land where the clouds love to rest,
Like a shroud of the dead on the mountain's
cold breast,
To the cataract's roar, where the eagles reply,
And the lake its lone bosom expands to the
sky.

—Rob Roy.

PROBABLY no great international commercial transaction of modern times approaches more nearly to the perfect ideal of a "pig-in-a-poke" bargain than the sale and transfer of the great unknown country of Alaska by the Russian Government to the United States in the year 1867; not merely the purchaser, but the seller also, in this case, being in almost entire ignorance of the value of the treasure so unceremoniously exchanged for seven and a quarter million dollars' worth of old gunboats belonging to the people of the United States. The hydrographic chart made by the Russian Government in the early part of the century was known to represent the coast line with reasonable accuracy; but no exploratory survey of the interior was ever undertaken by the Russians; nor has any such survey been subsequently contemplated by the Government of the United States. All that is known of the interior of Alaska and the adjacent country—and this knowledge is meagre and scanty in the extreme—has been gathered from the lips and pens of the few Arctic travellers who, animated with the commendable ambition of the noble lord of high degree of the old ballad, have gone abroad determined "strange countries for to see," and who have returned, from time to time, to astonish civilization with an *experto crede* account of its trackless, frozen, solitary wastes.

The present article, however, deals only casually and incidentally with

Alaska, but mainly with the adjacent British territory, which, aside from certain lines of travel, may also be said to be a *terra incognita*. To within a few years ago a great unexplored solitude extended to the eastward between the valleys of the Upper Yukon, or Lewes, and the Mackenzie, and from the 60th parallel of latitude northward to the shores of the "frozen ocean." This extensive region is known as the Yukon country, a name rendered appropriate by the fact that it is drained by the Yukon river and its tributaries, which form one of the great river systems of the world. A general account of the exploration of a portion of this great area is the subject of the present article.

Walled in by high mountains, and in consequence unapproachable from every side, it is not strange that the Yukon district should so long have remained in almost undisturbed seclusion. Had it not been for the fact that the rich metalliferous belt of the Coast and Gold Ranges passes through the district from one end to the other, the probability is that it would still have remained unexplored for many years to come.

Only four gates of approach to the district exist, and, strangely enough, these are situated at the four corners. From the north-west, access is gained to the country by following the Yukon from its mouth in Behring Sea; from the north-east, by crossing from the Mackenzie to the Porcupine, and following down the latter stream to its confluence with the Yukon; from the south-east, by ascending the Liard from Fort Simpson and crossing the watershed to the head waters of the Pelly; and finally, from the south-west, by en-