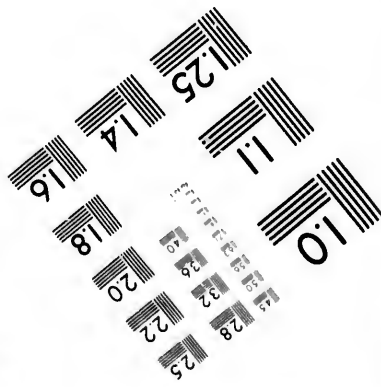
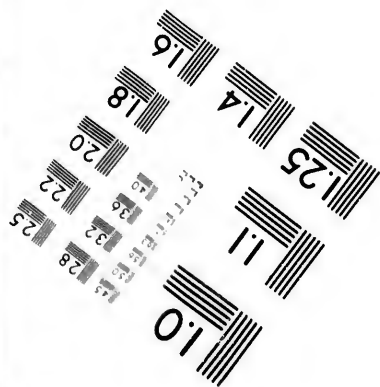
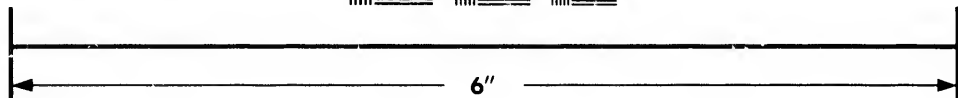
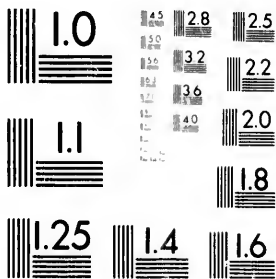


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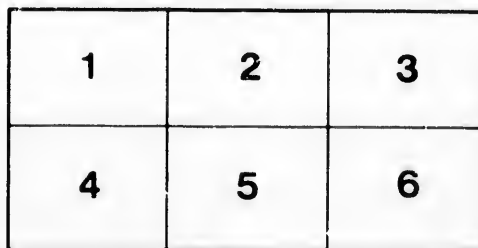
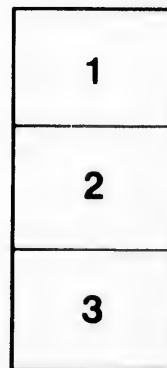
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THE BEHRING SEA QUESTION

In order to understand the Behring Sea question, some knowledge of the natural history of the fur seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*) is requisite. The more important facts as bearing on the question may be briefly stated; and those desiring to further study the question are referred to Mr. Henry W. Elliott's book, *Our Arctic Province*, published by C. Scribner's Sons, New York, to which I am indebted for much information.

The breeding ground of the fur seal is on the Pribylov Islands, St. Paul and St. George, in the Behring Sea.¹ They are about 180 miles from the nearest land, and were discovered by Pribylov, who commanded the sloop called 'St. George' engaged in the fur business, in 1786: they were then uninhabited, but natives were brought from Oonalashka and Atkha, and the population in 1880 consisted of 298 souls on St. Paul and ninety-two on St. George. St. Paul contains thirty-three and St. George twenty-seven square miles.

The islands have been rented from the United States Government by the Alaska Commercial Company, under certain regulations, including the education and care of the natives, all of whom are employed by the Company.

The breeding season lasts from May until August, some young seals and females remaining until November; but during the rest of the year the islands are deserted by the seals, whose whereabouts is not then distinctly known; it is probably far to the South, in the North Pacific Ocean.

A few old males begin to arrive at the islands early in May, but the mass early in June; they are then excessively fat, and weigh about 500 lbs.; the females arrive about the middle of June, though a few are earlier; they are much smaller than the males and weigh 80 to 90 lbs. Each bull selects a bit of land on arrival on which he collects several females as soon as they land, and defends against all other bulls, the fights between the bulls for the possession of the females being very severe. Each bull will collect from six to perhaps in some cases, as many as forty to fifty in his harem, those who by their early arrival have secured the best bits of ground, near the water, getting the most. The females give birth to a single pup within about twenty-

¹ See chart on page 608.

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four hours of landing, the period of gestation being twelve months less a few days. The males leave at the end of July and early in August, in an emaciated condition, not having fed nor entered the sea since they arrived: the females, however, constantly go to the sea to feed, and return to the land to nurse their young. The pups get down to the water's edge and begin to learn to swim when about six weeks old. By the middle of September they can all swim, and the 'Rookeries,' as the breeding grounds are called, are then broken up, and by the end of October and beginning of November all the mature seals have left: a few pups remain about the islands a little longer, but by the end of November the whole are gone, and the islands are deserted.

An important fact is that the males, up to the age of six years, take no part in breeding, but herd by themselves in a different part of the islands: they are called 'holluschickie,' or bachelor seals, and are calculated to consist of from one-half to one-third of the whole number of seals, which was put by Mr. Elliott in 1873 at about five millions. It is from these bachelor seals that the Alaska Commercial Company, who have the sole right of taking seals on the islands, select those to be killed: the number being limited by their agreement with the United States Government to 100,000 annually. The breeding seals are never disturbed or interfered with.

The manner of securing the bachelor seals is as follows:—In the very early morning the natives get between the bachelor seals and the sea. They then spread out on each flank of the herd, and drive the seals, which then form a long line, to the neighbourhood of the storehouses, where they are 'corralled.' The foreman then selects those to be killed, which are mostly three and four years old (the skins being finest at that period), and they are slaughtered by being knocked on the head with a wooden club, the others finding their way back to the sea.

Alaska was sold by Russia to the United States in 1867 for \$7,200,000 in gold, or rather less than a million and a half sterling. In the treaty conveying Alaska to the United States, the western and southern boundary of Alaska was defined as follows:—

The western limit, within which the territories and dominion conveyed are contained, passes through a point in Behring's Straits on the parallel of 65° 30' north latitude, at its intersection by the meridian which passes midway between the islands of Krusenstern, or Ignalosk, and the island of Ratmanoff, or Noonarbook, and proceeds due north, without limitation, into the Frozen Ocean. The same western limit, beginning at the same initial point, proceeds thence in a course nearly south-west, through Behring's Straits and Behring's Sea, so as to pass midway between the north-west point of the island of St. Lawrence and the south-east point of Cape Choukotski to the meridian of 172° west longitude; thence, from the intersection of that meridian, in a south-westerly direction, so as to pass midway between the island of Attou and the Copper Island of the Kormandarski couplet or group, in the North Pacific Ocean, to the meridian of 193° west longitude, so as to include in the territory conveyed the whole of the Aleutian Islands east of the meridian.

This has been taken by most people merely to convey all land to eastward of boundary.

For many years sealing schooners have been fitted out from Victoria, British Columbia, and from Puget's Sound and San Francisco, and have killed seals on the open sea, cruising off the coasts of the United States and of British Columbia, and have no doubt occasionally gone into the Behring Sea. These are mostly sailing schooners, though a few have an auxiliary screw. They are worked by from five



to eight white men, and carry six or seven boats with three Indians, viz. two rowers and a hunter to each; and these boats, when the weather is fine enough, cruise on the open sea round the schooner, often out of sight of her, and kill the seals sleeping on the water, either by spearing or shooting them, now generally the latter.

About the years 1884 and 1885, it being apparent that large

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profits were to be made by sealing, the number of schooners fitted out began to increase; and, although a good number of seals were killed to the south of the Aleutian Islands, the majority were killed inside the Behring Sea, the schooners following the seals up from the south, as they went to their breeding-ground on the Pribylov Islands.

In 1885 two schooners sealing in the Behring Sea were spoken by a United States revenue cruiser, though not molested; but in 1886 three were seized, they being at the time about seventy miles from land, or about halfway between the Pribylov Islands and Oomalashka, and these were condemned and confiscated by the United States Court at Sitka. Upon representations being made at Washington, it was said no more would be seized until the matter was discussed; nevertheless, in 1887 six were seized, and so the dispute began.

The Government of the United States hold that the Behring Sea is a *mare clausum* and included in Alaska.

The British Government hold that it is part of the Pacific Ocean and the open sea.

It is difficult to see how the United States can prove their contention. No doubt the Russians originally endeavoured to make the Behring Sea a *mare clausum*, and a ukase was issued in 1821 forbidding the approach of any vessel within thirty leagues of the coast of Russian America, a brig, the 'Pearl,' belonging to the United States being subsequently seized. In 1824-25, however, conventions were entered into between Russia and the United States, and Russia and Great Britain, which stipulated 'that in all parts of the great ocean, commonly known as the Pacific Ocean, and its adjoining seas to the south, the citizens and subjects of the high contracting powers may engage freely and without opposition in navigation and fishing, &c.,' and contemporary maps show that Behring Sea was considered part of the Pacific Ocean.

An indemnity was paid by the Russian Government to the owners of the 'Pearl.'

In 1842 the Russian Governor, Ekeolen, reported that United States and other whalers were fishing north of the Aleutian Islands, and asked that cruisers might be sent to stop them. The Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, however, replied that the United States had the right to fish everywhere in the Pacific Ocean. The number of whalers increased until, about the years 1854-55-56, they amounted to nearly 600, the majority belonging to the United States, and there was never any question of their right to fish in the Behring Sea. There are none there now, or hardly any, simply because the whales have disappeared, and there are none to catch.

In 1872, Mr. Phelps, the collector of Customs at San Francisco, wrote officially to the Government of the United States to say reports were about that vessels were to be sent from the Sandwich Islands, Japan, &c., to take seals on their annual migration northwards in the

passes of the Aleutian Islands, &c., and asking that a revenue vessel should be sent to protect the fishery. To this Mr. George S. Boutwell, who was then Secretary of the Treasury at Washington, replied, saying, '*I do not see that the United States would have the jurisdiction or power to drive off parties going up there for that purpose, unless they made such attempt within a marine league of the shore.*'

The 100,000 skins or less which were taken every year by the Alaska Commercial Company from the Pribylov Islands about supplied the market, and were worth about \$7½ a skin in 1885-87; the schooners, however, that escaped capture in 1887 put about 30,000 additional skins on the market, and this brought the price down to \$5. The Alaska Commercial Company was very influential, and it being evident their success was likely to be seriously interfered with commercially, an attempt was made to close the Behring Sea. The lease of this company came to an end a year or two ago, and the islands are now let to another company who made a higher bid.

There is no doubt that many female seals are killed by the schooners, and that it is not easy always to distinguish the females on the sea, when only their heads are above water. If this, however, is allowed to go on, there is grave danger of the species being eventually exterminated, as has nearly been the case with the sea otter. On the other hand, everyone has a right to fish and do so as he pleases in the open sea, and it is most important this right should not be interfered with.

The arbitrators now sitting at Paris for the settlement of this question consist of—British: Lord Hannen Sir J. D. Thompson; United States: Mr. Justice Haslan, Senator J. F. Morgan; French: Baron de Coureel; Italian: Marquis Visconti Venosta; Swedish: Mr. Gram; and whatever may be their finding, it is to be hoped that, although it is a most difficult question, some international agreement may be come to, to prevent the indiscriminate killing of female seals.

The only place where the fur seal is known to breed, in addition to the Pribylov Islands, is on Behring and Copper Islands, off the Russian coast. Two schooners were seized off these islands, but far from land, by Russian cruisers last year; so there is also a question to be settled with the Russian Government.

M. CULME SEYMOUR.

