

ANNALS

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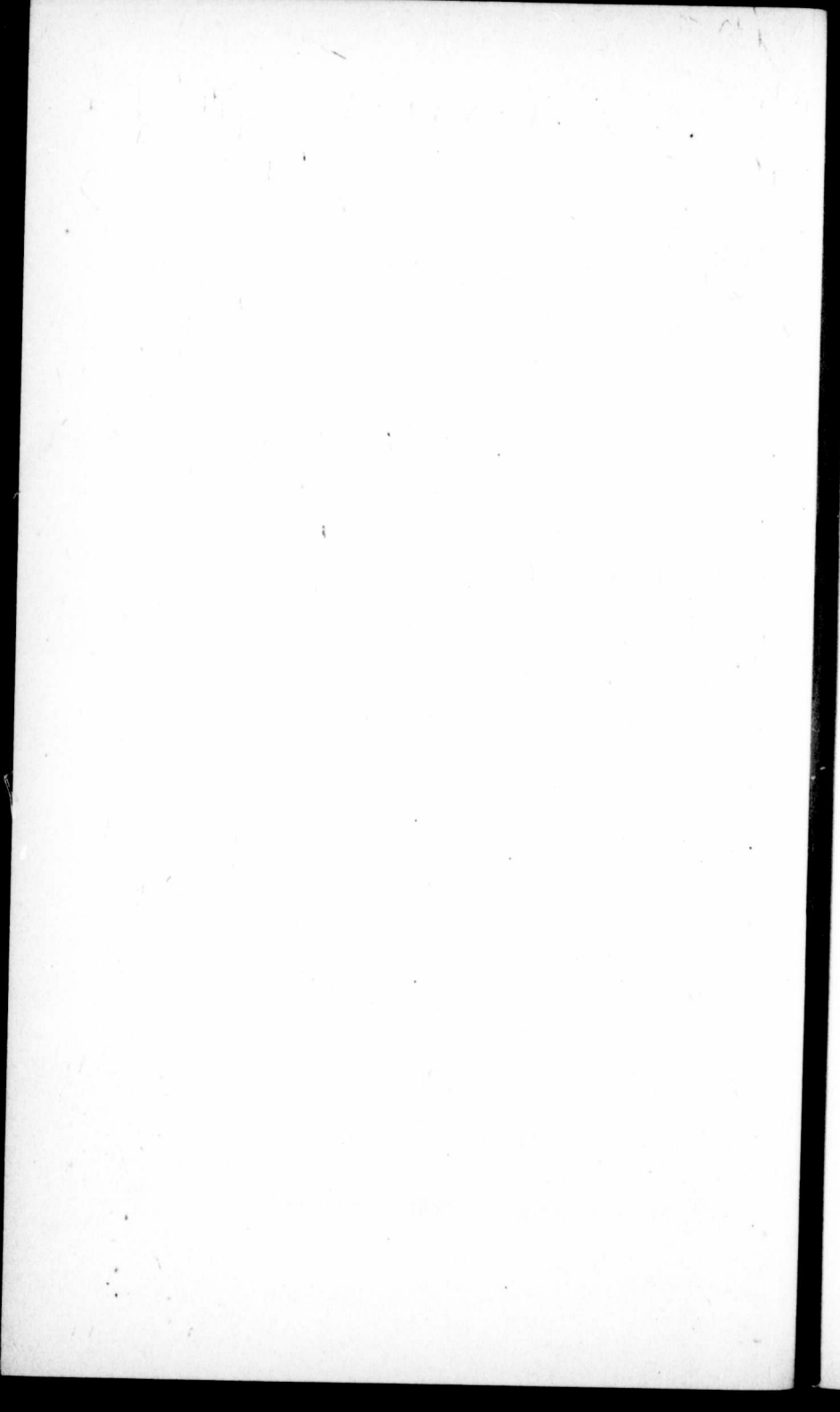
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OCTOBER, 1878.

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THREE-RIVERS.

PUBLISHED FOR THE INSTITUTION.



THE CROSS IN THE FAR NORTH.

LETTER FROM BISHOP SEGHERS.

Vivid Description of a long and arduous Missionary Tour in Alaska. Curious Habits of the Indians. The Pioneers of the Cross in their Ice-bound Home.

NULATO, ALASKA TERRITORY,
(On the Banks of the Yukon.)
64° 40' N. Lat., July 31, 1877.

REVEREND AND DEAR FATHER :

Thanks be to God, we are at the end of our long, wearisome and hazardous voyage. It is now six weeks and a few days since we left Nanaimo, and we have been constantly on the move. To-day we are at a place where it is our intention to set to work.

The steamer *St. Paul* left St. Michael on Thursday morning, 19th instant, and the same evening we left for Nulato. It would take me too much time to explain all the reasons why we decided to start for this place. A few words will briefly explain our position. The Indians on the lower Yukon live in the neighborhood of the Russian Mission. The Indians on the coast are said by the whites to be spoiled by their intercourse with whalers and given to the use of intoxicating drink. Therefore our field of labor will be confined to the interior of Alaska, particularly that portion watered by the grand and noble Yukon. This river (which the Indians call *Iouhkon*) is called *Kevihpak* near its mouth—two distinct names for what were supposed to be two distinct rivers. I shall not attempt to end the controversy as to who was the first to discover the *Kevihpak* and the

Yukon ; certain it is that the English traders on the upper Yukon adopted the name given by their Indians, and the Russians of the lower Yukon adopted the name given by their own Indians, and the former must, it appears, prevail. What a magnificent river the Yukon is ! Here at 600 miles from its mouth, it is no less than three miles wide ; the Frazer at Westminster is an insignificant creek compared with the Yukon at Nulato, and the Columbia river at Fort Vancouver is thrown into the shade by the Yukon even at those places at which the latter has its waters divided into branches by intervening islands. The Yukon's length is estimated at 2,000 miles.

Having made up our minds to go to Nulato, and to push our way through the interior, the question arose, How shal we get there ? The little stern-wheel steamer which every year sails up the Yukon had left a few days before our arrival at St. Michael. The traders that get their provisions at St. Michael every year at the opening of the season had left for their respective trading posts on the 3d of July. via the Yukon river. There remained, therefore, but the only alternative either to wait, nobody knew how long, for some unexpected chance to sail up the Yukon, or to push our way through the Uluhuk portage, the only practicable portage in the summer season. We chose the latter.

On Thursday, July 19, at 8 p. m., we left St. Michael's Redoubt—which is merely three or four houses built together, and occupied by four whites and a few Creoles, rather a more respectable looking name than our word « half-breed » — in a row-boat, traveling all night and the following day on the Behring Sea along the coast, past the Indian village *Kegitowruk*, and that most rough-looking cape called *Tolstoi* point ; saw a

Celuga, or small white whale, and arrived at the mouth of the Unalakleet river, wearied and hungry, 8 p. m. on Friday, having accomplished a trip of 80 miles in 24 hours. We pitched our tent near the Unalakleet village, exclusively occupied by Indians, and the next day we hired a *cedarrah* to proceed up the Unalakleet river as far as Uluhuk, from where we had to strike across the mountains.

The coast Indians use *cedarrahs* (skin-made canoes) covered entirely, as you know, with the exception of two or three holes to receive the occupants; the river Indians use birch canoes made of the bark of the birch tree, (*bouleau*) which are so light that I can easily lift up the largest of them, and both use *cedarrahs*, which are large, open, skin-made boats, with mast and oars. Some of them are 40 feet long. It was in such a *cedarrah* that we left the Unalakleet village on Saturday, July 21, at 3. 30 p. m., and sailed up the Unalakleet river with a strong, fair breeze. At 4 we landed at a fishing place called *Anouhtak*, where we hired two Indians to carry our baggage across the *Perenoz*, or portage, pitched our tent on pebblestones at 8, and after a few hours' rest, made another start the following Saturday morning at 5 o'clock. At *Ikpikluk* we hired two more Indians, and arrived at Uluhuk, where we partook of a sumptuous repast, consisting of bacon, tea and biscuit, but unfortunately rendered rather unpalatable through the enormous number of mosquitoes.

Father X. is right; the mosquitoes in Alaska are innumerable; their number is not legion, but millions and hundreds of thousands of millions. What a plague they are! One is involuntarily reminded of the third plague of Egypt, the celebrated *sciniphes*. They unceremoniously drop into your cup of tea; they are uncouth

enough to fall into your spoon before you take it to your lips. You open your mouth, either to speak or breathe, and half a dozen of mosquitoes sail into your throat and give you a fit of coughing. We wrapped ourselves in our blankets, and having covered every inch of our bodies, we victoriously bade defiance to the bloodthirsty insect, and enjoyed a sound sleep until 3 o'clock the following morning. At 5 we were ready, and off we went, Father Mandart and our four Indians, each carrying a load proportioned to his strength, and marching through the *tundra* like soldiers ready to die or to conquer.

Tundra is the name given to the marshy, low land of Alaska. It is overgrown with very soft and moist moss—so soft that, at every step one sinks down above his ankles, and not seldom to his very knees. So you can imagine what a fatiguing march it was on a rising ground, and what amount of perspiration it drew out of every pore.

A word about our costume. Above our coat we donned the *kamleeka*, which is a waterproof overcoat with sleeves, and a hood for the protection of the head, made of the entrails of seals; it is nearly transparent and very light, and as it has no other opening except a small hole to pass the head through, it reminds me of a chasuble. We wore gloves made of deer-skin and boots without either heels or soles, also made of skin; finally a pieces of mosquito netting to protect our faces gave us a most picturesque appearance. The hoods which the Indians have on their *kamleekas* and *parkies* (overcoats made of reinder-skin) and the manner in which they cut their hair, viz., in perfect imitation of the monastic tonsure, would make one imagine that he is amidst a

monastery of Benedictines ; but this practice of wearing the tonsure is peculiar to the coast Indians.

At 10. 30 a. m., having walked five hours and a half with very short halts, we thought it was time to partake of a frugal meal, and we sat down to eat some salmon, after which, for desert, we ate whortleberries picked on the *tundra*. We made another start when dinner was over, and halted at 1. 30 p. m., when all of a sudden my strength gave way. I was seized with a violent diarrhoea and severe vomiting—a remnant, I am sure, of my protracted sea-sickness. I sank down helpless, and of course, we pitched our tent and stayed over night on the slope of a mountain. I slept that night, and the following day, notwithstanding Father Mandart's uneasiness, we left at 9 o'clock in the morning, having myself not taken anything but a cup of tea and a small piece of biscuit. We ascended the mountain, and subsequently reached the tops of three or four mountains in succession, and walked until 3 p. m. before we struck water and wood for fuel, having in the meantime killed two ground-squirrels (the Indians' dinner) and two partridges, a sumptuous repast for ourselves. As we had not many provisions, our favorite prayer was, "give us this day our daily bread," and I assure you it has been often heard. Our dinner over, we waded across the Uluhuk river. It is impossible for me to tell you how many creeks we passed, how many times we crossed the same creek, and how many times we walked in creeks between and alongside of their banks. We slept that night in a very pretty little grove near a small stream of pure, ice-cold water, but unfortunately a great amount of rain fell that night and made bush travelling uncomfortable. On Wednesday, 25th, we left at 7 o'clock a. m., made our way with great difficulty through thick bushes, deep ravines and tortuous defiles

between high mountains ; killed two grouse, and stopped for dinner at 2 p. m., after a walk of seven hours. Our repast being over, we ascended the second range of mountains, and at 3.30, having said the first vespers of St. Ann, we descried in the distance the placid waters of the noble Yukon, which looked more like a lake than a river. We observed on several places the tracks of bears, which are very numerous on the Uluhuk mountains ; but we did not see any. We saw a wolf, however, lying near the river ; but, having seen us, he disappeared into the bush. That evening at 8 o'clock we camped in a low, marshy place between two high mountains. On Thursday, 26th of July, we left at 8 a. m., with a steady rain, fought our way through the thick brush, sank deeper into the ground than before, the rain having considerably moistened it ; having killed three grouse, went across a high hill where the Indian that carried the frying-pan broke it in his struggle with the branches of the alder, spruce and birch, and, dropping the pan, brought us only the handle. We dined that day at about 11 a. m., and at 2 p. m. struck the Yukon river about 6 miles below Lofka. So we had to walk alongside of the Yukon, now on the steep banks of the thick brush, then below on the muddy beach, scrambling occasionally across felled trees, and arrived at an abandoned log-house, called Lofka, about 5 p. m., where we made ourselves at home and dried our clothing. One of our Indians went back into the brush and arrived soon with two hawks he had killed. One was eaten by our Indians and the other by us ; and we found the meat so tender and palatable that we do not understand why people are not in the habit of eating hawks. Now came the question : How shall we ascend the Yukon to Nulato ? But feeling more anxious after our walk of 80 miles across the Perenez to sleep than to solve ques-

tions, we put every troublesome thought out of our mind and slept soundly until 7 a. m.

On Friday morning, 27th of July, our Indians discovered *ukali* (dried fish) stored away by an Indian called Tom, whom we met afterwards and paid, and having placed our *ukali* on the fire, we ate it for breakfast. While we were eating, one of our Indians, who had just left the house, rushed back, shouting "one canoe." We took it easy, continued our breakfast, whilst the other Indian ran outside, and presently all returned with the shout: "two canoes in sight." Undisturbed we proceeded to satisfy our appetite with our *ukali* when the Indians, having returned to the bank of the river to be on the lookout, suddenly came back with the welcome news: "one *cedarra*;" then we could stand it no longer, but rushed out, and beheld, at about four miles distant, a large *cedarra* proceeding under sail up the river, and nearing the place where we were camped. It was one of the three traders who had left St. Michael on the 3d of July, and was on his way to Nulato. Another of the traders had left Lofka four days before, and the third one was some ten days beyond the second. We applied for passage, were cordially received on board the *cedarra* with our baggage, and left for Nulato that same morning at 9.30 a. m., a distance from Lofka of some 120 miles. During that trip, which lasted four days, our meals consisted of flour, in the shape of flapjacks, and *ukali*. Having camped at 3 p. m., we arrived at *Alexibar rabara* (house of an Indian called Alexis by the Russians) at 7 and at Carlo di Nasca at 11 30 a. m., both places being Indian villages, apparently only fishing stations, occupied by most filthy-looking Indians.

From Russian accounts, it appears that a Finn, called "Carlo di Nasca," sailed up the river against

the advice of the Indians, who predicted that he would be caught in the ice, which he actually was at that place, where he put up a log-house, and which has since kept his name. We camped at 6 p. m. The next morning, Sunday, 29th, we left our camping place at 6 a. m., and enjoyed that day the pleasure of a drenching rain. However, in the midst of all that misery, I could not help remarking that I preferred it by far to sea sickness. At 5.30 we camped again, having passed a small Indian village called *Callag*.

The Yukon flows between two banks of very different nature and aspect ; but its waters are so divided by numerous islands that one very seldom enjoys the view of both banks at a time. On the left, going up, we had lofty mountains, high bluffs, perpendicular rocks, or generally a steep muddy bank, constantly worn away by the current, and falling into the water, in large bulky pieces, with a great splash. On the right we saw nothing but a low, heavily-timbered country, as far as the eye could reach. On Monday, our fourth and last day on the river, we made an early start at 2.45 a. m., passed such places as *Bolgoi* and *Takaskiletmika*, took our last meal at 10 a. m., and arrived at Nulato at 6 p. m., entirely wearied out by hunger and fatigue, Father Mandard apparently more so than myself. Nulato has an ancient Russian fort, built of three houses with palisades, which give it a square form, and now occupied by a Russian who trades for the Alaska Commercial Company. There are also two other whites, trading with Indians ; and I am informed that there are two large Indian villages near this redoubt, one of which we descry from here ; the location of the other, I do not know. It is here the Kuyoukoug Indians, who live some 40 miles up the Kuyoukoug river, murdered

Lieut. Barnard, an officer of the British navy, who was in search of Sir John Franklin ; besides two Russians and several women and children : a few crosses back of the redoubt indicate to the traveller their mournful fate and resting place. Here, then, is our centre of action. From here we intend to extend our sphere ; and if we succeed, here will probably be the mission of the first resident Catholic missionary of Alaska.

The Nulato Indians appear somewhat more cleanly and intelligent than the Indians we have hitherto seen on the Yukon river. The Kuyoukoug Indians are said to be a fierce, savage, indomitable race, always breathing menace of death to the white man. This, of course, will not deter us from going among them, as « the last are often found to be the first. » What astonishes me is the amount of hardship, suffering, and misery traders have to endure in this country for the sake of temporal again. *Nonne potero quod isti* ¹? and that, not for earthly and perishable goods, but for goods heavenly and eternal ! Assist us, then, with your prayers that our strength may be adequate to the task, and that a large harvest of souls may be the fruit of our difficult sewing. The winter is said to set in generally in the month of October, and lasts until Easter. We look forward for the cold weather without either fear or misgiving. *Deus providebit.* ² We are now in the Russian redoubt, and will probably be on the move in a few days, that is, as soon as I have secured an interpreter and learned some of the language. Accept this letter as a token of affection, and as a proof that my heart is in the midst of you. I am afraid that my anticipations

(1) Can I not do what these men have done ?

(2) God will provide.

regarding the expensiveness of our Alaska trip will prove but too true. The price of provisions and the expenses of travelling in the interior are enormous.

If I was sure of success among the Nulato Indians, and if there was a priest ready who could be intrusted with this mission, and remain a year alone, I would say send him per steamer *St. Paul* next spring ; but, under the circumstances, I cannot yet assume such a grave responsibility. However, if a priest should arrive here next year, and I should not think it advisable to leave him, nothing would be lost ; I would merely take him back again to Victoria with me.

The Russian who is in charge of this fort for the Alaska Commercial Company will leave to-morrow, August 2d, for Anvik, where a *cedarrah*, with a Norwegian who keeps the Anvik station, will proceed to St. Michael's redoubt ; and this I suppose to be the last chance I have to send you a letter from Alaska Territory. I have some doubt, however, whether it will reach you this year. I hope and pray it may.

F. Mandart bids me tell you that it is all right with him ; he studies the Russian and Indian languages with indomitable perseverance.

Farewell ; pray for me, and never cease beseeching the prayers of others in my behalf.

Your friend in J.-C.,

† CHARLES JOSEPH,
Bishop of Vancouver Island.

BISHOP SEGHER'S RETURN AFTER A YEAR'S
ABSENCE.

What a volume of events startling, sad and glorious had Bishop Seghers to hear of, after his missionary tour in Alaska, which for more than a year kept him out of communication with the nations called civilized ! The following letters were written by him on his return.

{ ST. MICHAEL'S REDOUBT,
{ Alaska Territory, June 30, 1878.

REVEREND AND DEAR FATHER JONCKAU :—OUR twelve month's exile is over, thanks be to God ! and we still enjoy the inappreciable blessings of life and good health. I arrived here from the Youkon river on the 20th ult., and was both surprised and disappointed to meet neither steamer nor schooner with news from the civilized world. What has become of Europe, threatened with a disastrous war at the time that we embarked for this Territory ? What has been done to the Roman Pontiff, and does the Church still possess her beloved Pope ? And Victoria, our island, our priests our Sisters, our « *pusillus grex*, » in what condition are they ? Such were a few of the questions that crowded into my mind, and for which I looked in vain for an answer. But lo ! the booming of the three cannons of the Redoubt roused us from sleep on the 25th ult., and told us that a vessel was sailing into Norton Sound. It was the *Staghound*, the schooner of the opposition Company. She brought me no mail, my letters being undoubtedly on board of the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer ; but she brought us at least some news from the rest of the world. The first tidings we received, *the very first*, was no less than the death of Pius IX ! True, the sadness of the news was miti

gated by the announcement that, in a very short time, a successor had been elected to the glorious Pontiff without any trouble or disturbance. But the news was so unexpected and so saddening, that I was well nigh wishing that the schooner had not arrived at all. However, that lamentable event had to occur and to be expected, and I fondly think that the reigning Pope is successful in making his children forget his predecessor. I shall not pass in review all the different items of news, every one of which was a surprise to us. I rather desire to write about this country, the Indians, etc., whilst I am expecting the arrival of the steamer *St. Paul* ; for, I beg you to notice that no letters have as yet reached me, save one sent by a friend in San Francisco.

I trust you did not forward any letter by the schooner *Gen. Miller*, which left San Francisco last fall, and was capsized and towed into the Bay bottom upwards. Poor vessel ! We towed her out of Unalaska harbor last year, and little did I know at the time that I would see her gallant captain and Col. Woods, the Collector of Customs. I am just now planning an expedition along the coast to the Pacific Ocean, if I can find any means of conveyance. The steamer *St. Paul*, I am assured, is not going further north than this place, but it appears that the *Richard Russ*, the Revenue Cutter, will visit the Esquimaux tribes. If so, I shall apply for passage on board, and thus, after completing my visit to this extensive territory, I shall, please God, be soon in your midst, after a very brief delay.

The weather here is quite cool, on account of the ice which covers the sea in all directions ; when we arrived here on the 20th, we found the bay full of ice, and we experienced some trouble in winding our way among the ice cakes ; since then, however, the breeze

has scattered the ice and driven it in all directions ; it scratched considerably the hull of the schooner, but now it can no more impede navigation, and has no effect beside cooling the atmosphere.

It is getting late, but not dark, the sun not setting until 10. 15 p. m., to rise again a little before 2 o'clock. However, if it is true elsewhere, I presume it is true here, too, to say and to practice : " Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man *everything* and wise. " And I propose to continue writing to-morrow. In the meantime, I cannot sufficiently admire how wonderfully the Creator has distributed the beneficial light of the sun all over the globe. The inhabitants of the earth living under the Equator do not enjoy one minute longer throughout the year the cheering lustre of the great luminary of day than we, the shivering toilers over ice and through snow, although some of our days last but three hours and a few minutes. But to-morrow, please God, I shall write at greater length of this distant part of the globe.

I am, as ever, yours very sincerely in J. C.,

✝ CHARLES J. SEGHERS,

Bishop of Vancouver Island

Continuation of letters from Mgr. Seghers, descriptive of his missionary journey to Alaska :

I finished my last letter to look for letters and news-papers supposed to have been forwarded by you. Vain efforts ! no letter, no journal, no message whatsoever ! It would be idle to study the cause of the (delay) mistake, for a mistake there must be ; but our knowing all about the way our letters went would not

make them come to hand. Therefore, with all possible resignation, I sit down to write to you all about our doings in this immense territory.

On the 5th of August, 1877, feast of our Lady of Nives, I instructed all the Indians of Tikaitski and of the neighborhood, gathered at their fisheries at the mouth of Nulato river. Having spent the forenoon in explaining the *Catholic Leader*, I accepted, at noon, the invitation tendered by one of them to partake of some lunch, and about 1 o'clock we noticed that the Indians went and took spontaneously the places which they occupied in the forenoon, showing themselves ready for further instruction. Encouraged by such an evident mark of their good disposition, I resumed my instruction; and towards the evening, Father Mandart and I left for the trading fort in a small canoe of birch bark, perfectly well pleased with our success, and determined to call the mission of Nulato by the name of

SANCTA MARIA AD NIVES.

I had so far made use of the services of a Creole, who speaks tolerably well the English language, but I felt the necessity of applying myself to the study of the Russian jargon that is spoken here; so I set to work at once. Do not imagine that this jargon is the Russian language; by no means; it is in many respects similar to our celebrated Chinook, but it is much more difficult to learn, as nearly all the words are Russian words; complete freedom and independence from grammatical rules constitute its chief feature; no tenses of verbs, no declension of nouns, no genders or adjectives, neither singular nor plural of pronouns. I learned the language sufficiently to explain the truths of our holy religion, and from that time I could get along in any

part of the country where the Youcon flows, for many young men among the Indians understand and speak the so-called Russian language. As you see, my presence here will prove of unquestionable usefulness to me ; I know the country, I am acquainted with its people, I am aware of their wants and dispositions. I know the language which is spoken here, the mode of traveling, of expenses necessary to live and to build ; in short, I am now informed of a multitude of things that I had no idea of before. Thus, for instance, I can now answer the question which I was once asked, whether Alaska is habitable, and I am in a position to say and to affirm that it is perfectly habitable. The winter is severe, but its severity is hardly felt, by reason of the means employed to escape its rigor. However, let me give you an idea of an Alaska winter. Frost begins in the middle of September ; the river is closed up by ice about the 10th of October, and the breaking up of the ice takes place in the middle of May. During six months it freezes continually day and night ; the ice of the Youcon, in certain places, reaches a thickness of six or seven feet. On two occasions the mercury froze and remained frozen during three days ; once in January and once in February. A spirit-thermometer at St. Michael's marked then 52° , that is 52° below Fahrenheit, which at Nulato is equivalent to at least 60° below zero, or 92° below the point where frost commences. And it was during these two periods of terrible cold that I was traveling on the snow and ice of the Youcon, between Nulato and the Russian mission. With regard to the Aurora Borealis, which is very frequent here, I give you the description of one, witnessed by Father Mandart and myself at Nulato on the 10th of September 1877. A strong breeze had blown all day from the North, the weather had been **very** fine but cool, the

mercury being at 23° Fahrenheit (9° below freezing) when at 8:30 p. m., about two and a half hours after sunset, the heavens were suddenly illumined by a bright streak of light, of a greenish hue, stretching across the zenith from north-west to south-east. It might, not inaccurately, be compared to a long cloud illumined by a bright light. We could easily distinguish the current of light which, with prodigious velocity, issued out of one part of the horizon, and disappeared among a few clouds in the distance on the opposite side. The width of the luminous haze was about equal to the length of the constellation Ursa Major. The rest of the sky was cloudless, the night calm and serene, and the moon, then at a small altitude towards the south, was partially hidden by a few clouds. There was sufficient light, independent of the light of the moon, to enable one to read, and we could, without trouble, see what time it was by a watch. The width, position and brightness of that luminous current varied incessantly; at one time it had nearly disappeared, and all at once it shone again, brighter than ever, shooting through the heavens, in the north-west, at the zenith and in the south-east almost simultaneously. The streak of light was visibly composed of luminous lines, parallel to each other, without, however, being straight; on the contrary the whole train of light seemed to move to and fro, similar to a huge flame, agitated by the wind, and issuing out of the fire of a powerful furnace; and the current of light, although plainly discernible, was so rapid that the eye could not follow it. That phenomenon lasted several hours. Having opened the box of a compass to examine whether the needle was affected, I could not notice the least motion.

The Indians of the Youcon, from Kaltag to New Klukayet, held an Igrouska at Nulato during the months

of October and November. I shall not describe this Indian feast to our Indians of Vancouver Island. The Igrouska besides, offered nothing particular, except, perhaps, the presence of Larrione, a convert of an Anglican minister, a creole, who lives in the fort of the Hudson Bay Company on the Porcupine river. Larrione, in spite of his Christianity, is still a *shamon* (tamanous or Indian doctor) and blessed with no less than four wives. What a convert !

Very sincerely yours in J. C.,

† CHARLES J. SEGHERS,
Bishop of Vancouver Island.

The steamer *St. Paul* dropped her anchor about 4 o'clock this morning. A mixture of good and bad news has reached me. I will improve the few days the steamer has to remain here to continue transmitting to you some of the most interesting particulars about this country. I have not seen further in the interior than New Klukayet, the junction of the Youcon and Tenana rivers, about 800 miles from the mouth of the former. There was no need of proceeding beyond that point, because most of the Indians that inhabit Alaska, along both rivers, come together at New Klukayet for trading purposes ; and there I met them in April. If I had traveled through their country I would either not have met them, or I would have found them all scattered, whereas, by waiting for them at the mouth of the Tenana, I met them all, with the exception of some eighty of them who did not come down. It appears there was sickness and starvation on the banks of the Tenana—sixty, according to one report, ten according to another, died for want of food ; the true number lies probably between these two extremes.

The ice of the Youcon, which had kept that noble river under its iron grasp since the 12th of October, began to break on the 5th of May in some spots where the current was exceedingly swift. On the 8th we heard it clattering and roaring, three miles off, and we saw miles of ice moving with awful velocity, clashing against one another, breaking, destroying, tearing up, but suddenly stopped by a sand bank, beyond which we could descry the green expanse of the great stream reflecting the rays of the sun. It was on the 10th of May that the ice suddenly broke in three large pieces and began majestically to float down in front of our lodgings ; but, the swiftest part of the current having cut its way through the frozen barrier along the opposite bank, the river remained again blocked up, moving occasionally, stopping again, until finally the water, seemingly impatient and furious, made a clear break, and down went cakes of ice, piles of ice, rafts of drift wood, floating banks of turf, the level of the river rising when an obstacle stopped the floating ruins, as much as a foot in one minute. During all this commotion, which was attended with a noise similar to the roaring of the sea, ice cakes were incessantly piling up alongside of the banks ; one block of ice would get stranded, another would come down apparently to tear the former to pieces, but lo ! it slowly moves on the top of the other, and there takes its stand on an inclined plane, the projecting part falling down in a rain of white dust ; a third comes whirling down, a fourth and a fifth, and all in rapid succession ascend the lofty barrier until there it stands towering thirty or forty feet above the level of the water. At one place blocks of ice threw themselves in that manner into the very bush among the trees.

On the 14th of May, the river having been comparatively clear, there was suddenly another crust of ice carried down in large cakes : it was the ice of the Upper Youcon which every year reaches New Klukayet after the swelling of the Tenana has forced the first crust away.

The first Indians, about ninety in number, arrived in thirty-three canoes on the 20th of May ; they proceeded down the river, without paddling, except an occasional stroke to keep the little fleet in a line stretching from near the banks to near the middle of the river ; there was a continued firing of guns growing louder and louder as the flotilla approached with the swift-flowing current ; to which the cannon of the trading-post sent now and then a thundering answer. But when near the landing-place the long line was suddenly broken, each paddled to his camping ground, tents were pitched, fires kindled, and the lonely spot acquired at once the busy bustle of a small city. From that day, there being all the time new arrivals, talking, laughing, shouting, dancing, singing, cheering, all in wild confusion ; a brisk trade was going on, long lasting speeches were delivered, guns were fired, and the missionary had to go around with a large bell to call the Indians together, succeeding hardly, after one hour of exertion, to collect them all in silence before the cross and the *Catholic Ladder*. The total number of Youcon and Tenana Indians was between 250 and 300. The last arrival was that of three canoes with four Indians from Copper River. The latter were literally covered with beads and had their faces tattooed. Copper River empties into the Pacific Ocean, west of St. Elias' mountain ; its Indian name marked on the map is *Atna* ; having questioned those Indians as to the name of the river on the banks of which they dwell in the Fall, they gave

me the name of *Atna*, which leaves no doubt as to the extent of their travel from Copper River to the Youcon, a distance of a thousand miles.

All the canoes in which they travel are of birch bark, and made in less than five days. Indians travel over ice and snow with sleds and dogs, until they reach either the Tenana or Youcon; during these trips they feed upon deer, bear and moose, and collect furs; then they make a small light canoe, capable of containing one, but sometimes as many as three persons, besides furs and camping apparatus; and after the breaking up of the ice, they drift down the current to the first trading-post they meet, where they procure flour, clothing, beads, fire-arms, ammunition, etc. This time they found also for their hungering souls the spiritual food of the word of God; but they were not surprised; my arrival was known by all the Indians before they reached the trading-post. What impression my words have made on them will be known, and the fruit will be reaped by the future missionaries whom the Father of mercies will, I hope, enable me to send into His harvest. May the seed which I have sown, literally at the sweat of my brow, produce fruit a hundred-fold!

Leaving New Klukayet on the 7th of June, we traveled the eight to nine hundred miles that separated us from St. Michael in thirteen days, stopping at several places. We killed one bear on the Youcon, saw the freshly-marked track of a large bear on the banks, and found all that could be desired in the line of food; swans, ducks, geese; fresh salmon being the chief element in our meals; not forgetting goose-eggs and swan-eggs, as large as an Oregon apple.

† CHARLES J. SEGHERS,
Bishop of Vancouver Island

Interesting letter from a Sister of Charity in the distant mission of McKenzie River, to her Mother Superioress, General Hospital, Montreal.

} CONVENT OF THE HOLY ANGELS,
{ Athabaska, July 8th 1877.

VERY HONORED AND DEAR MOTHER.

I could not have chosen a better time to write to you than this beautiful and joyous day, on which all hearts inebriated with happiness, vie with each other in celebrating the dearest and most delightful of feasts.

Flying then from this remote shore, the mind and heart seem transported at the first dawn of day, to dear Mount of the Holy Cross, in order to offer, very dear Mother, my wishes and vows, too happy if they are found worthy of being accepted.

Before entering into other matters, with effusion of heart must I thank you, very dear Mother, first, for having written me such a long letter, and afterwards for the truly maternal advice you had the goodness to dictate therein. I will endeavour to put it faithfully in practice, presuming on the prayers of a dear and devoted Mother.

Knowing your tender sympathy for our Northern Missions and the interest you bear towards them, I come to offer you as a festal bouquet, a little account which will give you a concise idea of our labors in this sterile and frozen garden of the North, to which Almighty God has called us to work. The works of the Almighty are ordinarily performed amidst contradictions and accompanied with the greatest anxiety ; they take birth at the foot of the Cross. But leave to the past trials and miseries, which but serve as a basis to

the moral and religious edifice in which, notwithstanding our limited number, we are so happy to labor.

The house we occupy as our residence has already had several destinations : in the first place, it served as chapel to the Oblate Missionaries when they came to this country ; it was afterwards converted into a coach-house, and after that, during three consecutive years, the RR. Fathers had there taken up their abode until our arrival in Athabaska. At that time the RR. Fathers abandoned their lodgings, to go and establish themselves in an old building which was used as a magazine, but which they managed to make habitable. Therefore, the above mentioned house is in its fourth, and probably last period. It is the oldest building in the mission. Before our arrival it measured 36ft in length and 24 in breath ; it afterwards received an addition of 20ft which gives it at present 56 ft. in length. Apart from the new portion of the garret, which is used for a dormitory, the ground floor alone is habitable. Our house is composed of eight parts, as follows : kitchen, two refectories, Community-room, Oratory, Parlour, the little boys' room, which at the same time serves as a class room, the little girls' room, and lastly the above mentioned dormitory. You see, dear Mother, how narrowly we are situated ; and if these apartments were even of a passable size, but, alas ! they are only little nooks, lighted by a window of nine panes. To cite an example. I will particularize the little girls' room, the measure of which is 12 ft. by 10 ; this gives you an idea of the rest. Dear Mother, having spoken of the dwelling, let us now speak of its inmates. At present our children number 20, 8 of which are boys and 12 girls, as much half breed as savage ; of this number 5 are orphans. It is probable that the number will have increased to 30 by

the time you receive this letter, as demands are coming from all sides. All those children are washed, kept mended, and partly clothed by ourselves : being but three, we can hardly suffice for the work notwithstanding our activity, but, thanks be to God, they give us a great deal of consolation.

Their hearts as well as their minds are very capable of culture ; I might even add, that in this respect, nothing more could be desired. The children of this country are, in general, very intelligent. The greater number of those who are under our care learned to read and write in a short time ; there are even some among them who have a great aptitude for reckoning. The Officers of the Company, whom we ordinarily invite to assist at the examinations, wonder at the rapid progress of the scholars, and frankly avow that our school surpasses by far the one kept by the Protestant Schoolmaster. This we willingly believe, because labor performed through love of money can never exceed that which is inspired and sustained through love for God. Again we glory in having no other interest than the welfare of these dear little souls, whom the Almighty has confided to our care, in order to direct their minds and hearts towards him. To comprehend well the immense benefit of a religious school in this dull country, where for ages the demon had reigned as sovereign, it will suffice to cast a glance on the material and moral condition in which infancy lies among the poor Indians. It is true we have no longer to deplore frightful scenes of barbarism, nor the abandonment of infants and old people to the wild beasts of the forest ; the missionaries, in bringing the light of the Gospel among this degraded population, put an end to these abominations. But it is nevertheless true to say, that great miseries

still exist, resulting on the one side from the poverty that prevails, and on the other from the complete want of education. See that poor little half-clothed savage ; he cries on the first day of his existence, because he has already tasted sufferings ;—he suffers from want of care, which a poor mother, notwithstanding the love she bears him, is unable to give, having herself been reared in the same manner ; he suffers from cold because he must live under a windy sky, and walk continually on ground frozen and thickly covered with snow ; he has no other shelter than the forest trees ; no other means of subsistence than the venturesome chase of wild animals, and even in this situation he is lucky, if his frail nature does not sink under the weight of all these hardships. Hunger and cold are plagues which very often bring infants and old persons to their graves. During the past winter many have perished. At the Northern extremity of our great Athabaska Lake, 17 persons, 11 of whom were infants, and 6 old persons, died in this manner. These poor creatures hoped they had strength enough to walk and reach a more hospitable neighborhood in order to save their lives, but, alas, infancy and old age being naturally feeble, the length of the road was too much for them, and, worn out with exhaustion they fell on the icy lake, never more to rise. Their relatives even had no power to save them, having themselves either fallen or died. The young persons alone, being stronger, a like terrible death by reaching a certain place where they received the necessary relief. It was pitiful to see these poor things, some having their feet and hands frozen, others their faces, and all suffering more or less. Poor savages, how hard and pitiable is their situation ! Yet, dear Mother, this side of the picture is not the most afflicting. The

experience of sufferings, and the inborn instinct which maintains a life that is almost useless, hasten for the infant the epoch of maturer years. It is during this tender and delicate age, when the conscience is awake, and the eye of the soul open to the first impressions of virtue or vice, that the mother should understand the importance of the duty she has to fulfill with regard to the little being placed under her maternal care, and which may remain an angel or become a demon. But alas ! too often, the germ of future depravity is already to be seen in this innocent being. Anger, brutality, and the basest vices manifest themselves, and, what is saddest, towards those whom nature commands him to love and respect ; he does not understand this yet, but still he becomes accustomed to such manners ; the soul is not stained, but modesty, that guardian of innocence, loses its native delicacy. In presence of this picture, which we have continually under our eyes, we understand the grave importance of our work :—the regeneration of this poor people by christian education ;—the forming of the minds and hearts of children at an age when they are most apt to receive the sweet and salutary impressions of virtue and good example. Oh ! that we may be always worthy of our sublime vocation, and with fidelity fulfill its holy obligations ! May the divine Mother of missionaries assist us by her powerful intercession, and protect us against the snares of the evil spirit. We hope that the little grain of mustard seed we are cultivating with love will one day become a beautiful tree. Time and patience, but above all the dew of divine grace which will be obtained by the fervent prayers of those who are interested in the salvation of those poor savages, will produce this effect.

You now see, dear Mother, the difficulties which partly impede our work. The size of our house is insuffi-

cient for the number of children we might receive, as also for the works of charity which might be practiced towards the poor and the infirm. Our hearts bleed when we are obliged to refuse these poor people, whose fate is so pitiful, and who, if in our hands, would receive the care their condition requires. Sometimes, being unable to do more, we visit them, that is when their huts are near enough to enable us to do so. Much good might be done if we only had sufficient means to undertake the erection of a building spacious enough for our different works ; but penury greatly contradicts our wishes. Another obstacle in our way is the want of clothing for our dear orphans ; they ordinarily come to us more covered with vermin than with clothes. It is true that the RR. Fathers aid us in this respect ; and the little provisions they possess are shared with us, As I have mentioned provisions, I will take the liberty of stating to you the privy richness of our table, that of our orphans almost resembling our own. In the first place, our meats consist in the flesh of wild animals, which the servants of the Mission, the reverend Fathers, and sometimes even the Bishop go chase to a distance which would appear incredible in our civilized countries. Secondly, our food is composed of fish, which is very abundant, and without this resource we could not feed our children, who as I have already said, are whole boarders. But what trouble does it not impose to draw from under the ice the eight thousand fishes which feed us during the winter ! This draught is made at nine miles from the mouth of the lake. How many voyages must then be made to carry this fish, in vehicles with which you are well acquainted, and under a temperature sometimes as low as 49 degrees. It is useless to add that the

missionaries try to improve our position, and relieve our and our children's wants, but such is impossible. Their zeal is admirable, and they expect a favorable result. They suffer like ourselves from contradictory obstacles ; obstacles which we hope to see disappear with time. Their devotedness in our regard is, I might say, without bounds, and at each moment fills us with confusion.

From the following observations you can judge how much our work would gain by the acquisition of the resources of which we are in complete want.

First, we want a more spacious building.

Secondly, clothing for our children.

Thirdly, a pharmacy for the infirm, be it ever so small.

Fourthly, a number of school articles.

To sum up, it is money we need. How happy would we not be, did we but possess a little fortune on which we could rely to relieve our most pressing wants! My imagination does nothing but dream on this day and night, and how many projects does not my mind form on the same subject! But alas, will they be ever realized? Yes, I have the sweet conviction they will, because there are in dear Canada so many generous souls who would be happy to contribute towards the spreading of our holy religion. Yes, we will one day have the happiness of relying on pecuniary aid, and by that means we shall be able to do more good. May the God of all charity deign to touch the hearts of those who interest themselves in favor of our poor Indians. If they only considered the service they would render them, and themselves also, by placing their superfluities in a heavenly bank. A hundred-fold will be retur-

ned to them, because our divine Lord has so promised, and his treasury will never fail.

These, dear Mother, are a few details that for a long time I have desired to give you, hoping they will interest you, and at the same time touch the sensible and charitable hearts of all those under whose notice these few incomplete lines may fall. Adieu, very dear Mother; it is through the amiable Heart of Jesus that I subscribe myself,

Your very affectionate daughter in O. L.

SISTER ST. MICHAEL OF THE ANGELS.

Midnight Mass Among the Indians, at the Tulalip Indian Agency in Washington Territory.

For several days previous to the festival of the Nativity of Our Lord, the Catholic Indians of the country surrounding Tulalip were seen arriving at the reservation to celebrate the approaching great Christian holiday. The majority were of the Suquamish tribe, of the Port Madison Reservation, and of the Swinomish Reservation. They made encampments near the mission church, where every opportunity to make themselves comfortable was afforded them by Rev. Father Chirouse, O. M. I., and Rev. Father Richards, O. M. I., missionaries, and by the Sisters of Providence, in charge of the industrial school. Major Mallett, the agent, also interested himself in their behalf, and one day sent them a large ox to kill for their own use, and for which the Indians felt deeply grateful.

At twelve o'clock on the night of the 24th the commodious mission church was crowded with a numerous

congregation who had assembled to assist at midnight Mass. The school girls, under the charge of the sisters and some ladies of neighboring villages, occupied the gallery ; the school boys, under the devoted care of Rev. DeVries, O. M. I., sat on benches in the body of the church, as also a number of gentlemen from the neighboring towns and the employees of the agency ; the Indians—the men on one side and the women on the other—sat on the floor to economize space.

The hour having arrived for the service to commence, Rev. Father Chirouse, who has been an Indian missionary in this part of the country for thirty years, pronounced an earnest and even eloquent discourse explanatory of the festival and the consoling lesson it taught in the Indian, Chinook, and English languages. After the sermon a scene, new to me, but full of beauty and edification, ensued, namely, the lighting of candles, provided for the purpose by each individual, and the formation into line of the entire congregation, which marched into processional order within the sanctuary to the crib where the Infant reposed, where the candles were deposited as an offering. The scene was beautiful and edifying, I have said, but it was more than that—to me it was touching, grand, sublime ! Although it was humble, poor, very poor even, it equalled in religious solemnity the grand ceremonies which I have witnessed in Notre Dame of Paris, the Duomo of Milan, and San Genaro of Naples. Yes, I confess it, the poor wooden altar, covered over with wall paper, appeared to me—under the influence of the circumstances, time, and place—as beautiful as a marble block of Italian elaborately sculptured ; the brass crucifix upon the tabernacle as rich as a cross of gold ; the rude candlesticks as resplendent as candelabra of precious metals : the plain vestment of the humble missionary as rich as the jewelled cape of a prelate ; the artificial

flowers of paper and cambric, and the candles stuck in apples, which adorned the representation of the crib of Bethlehem, as appropriate as choice hot-house exotics and costle lamps ; the boughs from the primeval forest which adorned the walls as artistic as the clustered columns of a Gothic abbey, the procession of men, women and children, some in full dress, others in their shirt-sleeves, as decorous and as pleasing in the eyes of God as any of the millions of groups of the faithful worshipping him in the centres of religious civilization and refinement.

The solemn High Mass which followed this preliminary exercise was celebrated by Rev. Father Richards. The school-girls forming the first choir, and the school-boys the second, chanted the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* in the Gregorian style, with melodeon accompaniment. At the offertory the *Adeste Fideles*, and at the communion an english Christmas hymn, were sung. During the service the girls also sung the French hymn, *Nouvelle agreable*. The singing was really good. Six Indian boys served the Mass. A very large number of the congregation had the happiness of receiving the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, some for the first time, thus crowning the festive ceremonies with the holy of holies.
