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**Vikings of the Pacific The
Adventures of the Explorers who
Came from the West, Eastward**

Agnes C. (Agnes Christina) Laut

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Seal Rookery, Commander Islands.

[Frontispiece: Seal Rookery, Commander Islands.]

Foreword

At the very time the early explorers of New France were pressing from the east, westward, a tide of adventure had set across Siberia and the Pacific from the west, eastward. Carrier and Champlain of New France in the east have their counterparts and contemporaries on the Pacific coast of America in Francis Drake, the English pirate on the coast of California, and in Staduchin and Deshneff and other Cossack plunderers of the North Pacific, whose rickety keels first ploughed a furrow over the trackless sea out from Asia. Marquette, Jolliet and La Salle—backed by the prestige of the French government are not unlike the English navigators, Cook and Vancouver, sent out by the English Admiralty. Radisson, privateer and adventurer, might find counterpart on the Pacific coast in either Gray, the discoverer of the Columbia, or Ledyard, whose ill-fated, wildcat plans resulted in the Lewis and Clark expedition. Bering was contemporaneous with La Vérendrye; and so the comparison might be carried on between Benyowsky, the Polish pirate of the Pacific, or the Outlaw Hunters of Russia, and the famous buccaneers of the eastern Spanish Main. The main point is—that both tides {viii} of adventure, from the east, westward, from the west, eastward, met, and clashed, and finally coalesced in the great fur trade, that won the West.

The Spaniards of the Southwest—even when they extended their explorations into the Northwest—have not been included in this volume, for the simple reason they would require a volume by themselves. Also, their aims as explorers were always secondary to their aims as treasure hunters; and their main exploits were confined to the Southwest. Other Pacific coast explorers, like La Pérouse, are not included here because they were not, in the truest sense, discoverers, and their exploits really belong to the story of the fights among the different fur companies, who came on the ground after the first adventurers.

In every case, reference has been to first sources, to the records left by the doers of the acts themselves, or their contemporaries—some of the data in manuscript, some in print; but it may as well be frankly acknowledged that *all* first sources have *not* been exhausted.

To do so in the case of a single explorer, say either Drake or Bering—would require a lifetime. For instance, there are in St. Petersburg some thirty thousand folios on the Bering expedition to America. Probably only one person—a Danish professor—has ever examined all of these; and the results of his investigations I have consulted. Also, there are in the State Department, Washington, some hundred old log-books of the Russian hunters which {ix} have—as far as I know—never been turned by a single hand, though I understand their outsides were looked at during the fur seal controversy. The data on this era of adventure I have chiefly obtained from the works of Russian archivists, published in French and English. To give a list of all authorities quoted would be impossible. On Alaska alone, the least-known section of the Pacific coast, there is a bibliographical list of four thousand. The better-known coast southward has equally voluminous records. Nor is such a list necessary. Nine-tenths of it are made up of either descriptive works or purely scientific pamphlets; and of the remaining tenth, the contents are obtained in undiluted condition by going directly to the first sources. A few of these first sources are indicated in each section.

It is somewhat remarkable that Gray—as true a naval hero as ever trod the quarter-deck, who did the same for the West as Carrier for the St. Lawrence, and Hudson for the river named after him—is the one man of the Pacific coast discoverers of whom there are scantiest records. Authentic histories are still written, that cast doubt on his achievement. Certainly a century ago Gray was lionized in Boston; but it may be his feat was overshadowed by the world-history of the new American republic and the Napoleonic wars at the opening of the nineteenth century; or the world may have taken him at his own valuation; and Gray was a hero of the non-shouting sort. The data on {x} Gray's discovery have been obtained from the descendants of the Boston men who outfitted him, and from his own great-grandchildren. Though he died a poor man, the red blood of his courage and ability seems to have come down to his descendants; for their names are among the best known in contemporary American life. To them my thanks are tendered. Since the contents of this volume appeared serially in *Leslie's Monthly*, *Outing*, and *Harper's Magazine*, fresh data have been sent to me on minor points from descendants of the explorers and from collectors. I take this oppor-

tunity to thank these contributors. Among many others, special thanks are due Dr. George Davidson, President of San Francisco Geographical Society, for facts relating to the topography of the coast, and to Dr. Leo Stejneger of the Smithsonian, Washington, for facts gathered on the very spot where Bering perished.

WASSAIC, New York,
July 15, 1905.

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