

IN A SORRY PLIGHT

Hordes of Weary and Penniless Treasure Seekers in Camp at Dawson,

Without Any Knowledge of Mining and Unable to Get Any Employment.

(Sam. W. Wall in San Francisco Call.) Dawson City, June 24, via Seattle, July 18.—Following close upon the heels of the ice as it ran out of the lakes I arrived in Dawson on the night of June 15, the day that stands in the calendar of the Yukon from year to year for the arrival at this point of the first up-river boat. I found already tied up at the front the little steamer May West, the Richardson boat that wintered below Minook. The still smaller steamer Victoria, belonging to the Alaska Commercial Company party that was ice-bound at Circle City, had already arrived and that day left for the Pelly river with a few passengers who were going out over the Dalton trail. The May West was listing passengers for St. Michael. The Porteus B. Weare of Dawson, which wintered at Circle, had also arrived, discharged cargo and was away hunting wood. The Bella, of the Alaska Commercial Company, which wintered at Circle, was reported to have left a barge on a bar near Circle City and to have cut loose and gone back to Fort Liambin for another cargo.

The river is falling rapidly. It had opened many days ahead of the lakes. It rose high and flooded all the flat upon which the business portion of Dawson stands and threatened to carry the city down with it. For several days the water was knee deep on Front street and men walked around the billiard tables or sat at faro in their rubber boots, the water above their ankles.

The flood subsided as it had come, almost in a day, and left Dawson as I found it, a marvel of new cities. When I started out over the ice in March last Dawson was a town of about 2,000 people. The business portion consisted mainly of the stores of the two big companies, the Alaska Commercial and the North American Trading and Transportation, together with a dozen or more saloons and dance houses which stood in a frequently broken line along one side of First avenue or Front street. The residence portion was a group of log cabins on the first rise of a hill to the northward.

I returned to find both sides of Front street built up almost without a break for a distance of nearly three-quarters of a mile, and the business pushed into the cross streets and along Second avenue. The water front down on the river is packed closely for a mile and a half with boats and barges, two and three deep, many of them with goods for sale and flying banners of new industries—photographers, dentists, doctors and lawyers—all manner of people. At the mouth of the Klondike southward on both sides the tents of the new comers resemble an army in camp, and northward of the town on the rise of the hill is another army. There Major Walsh, commissioner or governor of the territory, has pitched his tent where he can command a view of the town.

All the surrounding hillside that last winter were merely wooded spaces are rapidly being resolved into the city of Dawson. The trees are down and in their place stand cabins in all stages of construction, most of them on the simplest architectural plans, but many being built with a care and neatness that indicate permanent residence. Most of the business places on Front street are mere rough boards or canvas affairs, put up with regard to speed rather than to appearance or permanency, but there are a few, quite pretentious buildings of newer order. These are, without exception, saloons and gambling and lodging houses. They are all doing a great business.

Front street, long and wide as it is, is crowded with people at every hour of the evening from 5 o'clock till midnight. Life is at high tension. The great number of new comers is hourly being increased by the boats and barges, and the circle of tents widens daily; saloons and dance houses are numbered by the score; the water side of Front street resembles the approach to a state fair.

In the hastily constructed booths every line of traffic is represented, including lemonade (at 50 cents a glass), ice cream, news and peanut stands. Both sides of the street boast sidewalks, but the roadway is axle deep with mud. The street is littered with logs and the wreckage of buildings.

The Klondike Nugget and the Yukon Midnight Sun are two newspapers already established, while at least half a dozen other plants are here or are on the way.

A little steamer, the Bellingham, that came down from the lakes, running the rapids successfully, plies hourly between the A. C. company's wharf and Klondike city, on the other side of the Klondike, and carries a crowd of passengers at every trip at \$1 a head.

The camp knows no rest. There are now twenty-four hours of broad daylight every day and twenty hours of warm, bright sunlight. And there is a general indignation on the part of the inhabitants to sleep. The hours claimed by night in San Francisco—from 8 o'clock of the evening until 6 of the morning—are the pleasantest of the day, being cooler and the light more subdued, although for nine hours of that time the sun is above the horizon. For this reason many sleep during the warm hours of the day and the streets are full of life every hour of the so-called night.

There is one little pause once a week in the hurly-burly. Commissioner Walsh has pronounced a Sunday law. At 12 o'clock sharp on Saturday night business stops, particularly that of the saloons, including gambling. In such respect this regulation held that neither friendship, love for money can procure a drink over a bar after 12 o'clock midnight of Saturday or before midnight of Sunday. The big jig of the week is given these few hours in which to recover itself and know the joy of starting anew.

Money or dust flows into town daily, and thence finds lodgment across the bars, or over the faro and poker tables. The two commercial companies get a big share of it and finally the banks get some. There are two banks here now, operating under canvas, both Canadian institutions.

The clean-up on the creeks is something more than half completed and is suffering a pause for lack of water, and the seasons following so soon after a flood. The warm sun of the quickly lengthened days turned the snow into water and the whole ran off with a rush. Much good drift was carried away, dams and sluices broke and very considerable loss and damage were suffered. When the water was high as not to make available the water of the creek were still—and still remain—unwashed. These are now awaiting some expected August rains.

Whether or not it is because of the insistent enforcement of the 10 per cent royalty law by Commissioner Walsh, or because at this moment prepared to say, but certain it is there is an air of disappointment in the town with regard to the gold output. Almost all now shade down the figures of their estimate as made early in the spring. The total is variously placed at from \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000. Alex. McDonald, the largest operator in the district, places it at \$20,000,000. In the spring and before the arrival of Commissioner Walsh it generally was believed that the government would not enforce the royalty law. This hope has failed, however, and the exaction of this big percentage of the output causes widespread disgust and disappointment. Great as the yield is, therefore, there is a certain sense of depression in the ranks among the miners, and nowhere is there any disposition to boom properties that are being worked, or to give out inflated reports of the output. Many of the miners have large indebtedness to meet, and Commissioner Walsh allowed them fifteen days after the completion of the clean-up in which to meet these engagements before making their returns to the government. Royalty has already been paid into the banks, which are authorized to make the collection upon \$8,000,000, chiefly taken out of El Dorado creek.

It is reasonably certain to say that the clean-up on the lower Bonanza—that is, Bonanza below Discovery, from about below has been nearly completed, appointing Bonanza above Discovery has more than met expectation; this is true also of El Dorado.

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A big stampede went down from here a month ago, not only to locate mining claims, but to stake town lots at the mouth of Mission Creek. It is proposed to control the old and new Forty Mile district from Eagle City by an all-American route. By going up Mission Creek and crossing at the divide, the head waters of Forty Mile Creek are entered upon. As all the rich diggings of this district, together with the newly discovered diggings on its tributaries, are in American territory, it is easy to understand this effort to place the supply depot on the American side.

Many miners are going down to Rampart City and the Mponok diggings near the Tannana and the Koyukuk. Captain W. H. Geiger has taken his little steamer St. Michael to the mouth of the river for a cargo and will return and go up the Koyukuk with as many passengers as he can carry.

Considerable anxiety is felt concerning the fact that are coming up the river, especially the new ones, with the old companies. The old companies are said to have secured all the best pilots on the river for their service and to have control of the wood cut fast ways—the fact that so many boats on the river between these two points have run aground gives excuse for this anxiety. The May West has made a good escape. She brought twenty-six very forlorn-looking passengers into port with her. They had been wintering down the river and put in most of the time worrying the captain. He had guaranteed to land them at Dawson and to feed them until he did so. He had not counted on being caught in the ice 1,000 miles from his destination and he was short of food for the filling of his contract. Some of his passengers had a mortgage on his boat and were threatened to tie her up here or at Circle City. Captain Worth, a hale and hearty man at St. Michael last summer, arrived here a haggard and broken-down man, having lost forty-two pounds in weight since his cruise began. Of all the trouble that the frozen river witnessed last winter in all its great length, Captain Worth has his own case was the most trying. He would go through it again for a fortune.

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So much for that picture. Now for this: Ten thousand people on the way to Dawson or already crowding its streets feel the touch of the depression that is here, despite the heaps of gold in sight. The throng is depressed because of its own greatness. So many new comers are here that they cannot see how it may be possible to supply all with work. They feel that anything less than overleaping the output must result in a cut in wages at least, if not a lack of work for many.

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Many miners are going down to Rampart City and the Mponok diggings near the Tannana and the Koyukuk. Captain W. H. Geiger has taken his little steamer St. Michael to the mouth of the river for a cargo and will return and go up the Koyukuk with as many passengers as he can carry.

Considerable anxiety is felt concerning the fact that are coming up the river, especially the new ones, with the old companies. The old companies are said to have secured all the best pilots on the river for their service and to have control of the wood cut fast ways—the fact that so many boats on the river between these two points have run aground gives excuse for this anxiety. The May West has made a good escape. She brought twenty-six very forlorn-looking passengers into port with her. They had been wintering down the river and put in most of the time worrying the captain. He had guaranteed to land them at Dawson and to feed them until he did so. He had not counted on being caught in the ice 1,000 miles from his destination and he was short of food for the filling of his contract. Some of his passengers had a mortgage on his boat and were threatened to tie her up here or at Circle City. Captain Worth, a hale and hearty man at St. Michael last summer, arrived here a haggard and broken-down man, having lost forty-two pounds in weight since his cruise began. Of all the trouble that the frozen river witnessed last winter in all its great length, Captain Worth has his own case was the most trying. He would go through it again for a fortune.

The difficulty with the passengers was adjusted here and the boat released to go and work out her indebtedness. Besides Captain Worth and Steward Harry Gifford, she brought the following passengers who had wintered with her: H. H. Honnen, John Tyler, James Cook, Frank Hour, Harry Nunan, J. A. Anderson, Mr. Peterson, Mr. Clark, all of Seattle; Henry Shoemaker, of Grass Valley, Cal.; James Flanner, Helena, Mont.; Mr. Adams, New York; Will Lindsay, Port Townsend; John Miller and Fred Heath, Tacoma; Al Mole, Denver; Will Campbell and Will Dwyer, Seattle; Mr. Scott, Mr. Cole, Mr. Robbins, Mr. Schulte and Mr. Dunham, San Francisco; Frank Holt, California; Mr. Todd, Oakland; Charles Range, Idaho, and Alex. McDonald, Michigan.

On her return trip down the river she took seventy passengers, the first to seek the outside by way of the mouth of the river. The passengers were released from embarkment and set on the road toward speedy development.

Sulphur Creek is turning out fully as rich as its early prospects indicated. These creeks are still in the prospecting stage, and should they fulfil their promise they will be sufficient alone to sustain the camp at Dawson for several years.

The two river steamers of the North American Trading and Transportation Company, the Hamilton and the Porteus B. Weare, now at the docks preparing to go down the river, will carry with them about four millions in gold. The total shipment of gold to the outside is most difficult to arrive at, but will not fall short of eight millions. Porteus B. Weare, head of the North American Trading and Transportation, is making a general survey of the situation, and is much pleased with all the indications. He started up the creeks this morning.

So much for that picture. Now for this: Ten thousand people on the way to Dawson or already crowding its streets feel the touch of the depression that is here, despite the heaps of gold in sight. The throng is depressed because of its own greatness. So many new comers are here that they cannot see how it may be possible to supply all with work. They feel that anything less than overleaping the output must result in a cut in wages at least, if not a lack of work for many.

The new comers are of the most helpless character, and already grave forebodings are made concerning them as the long winter that is coming. It is pitiful to see them sitting in their boats along the water front, at the end of their long and hurried journey, utterly at a loss what to do now that they are here.

The gold commissioner is hourly besieged by men asking him to please tell them where there is a creek upon which they can stake a gold mine. Numbers of the more alert new comers, men who came into the country with a sturdy purpose to mine, are, after a short stay here, passing by Dawson and hurrying down to the plentiful diggings on the American side.

The American side, broadly speaking, is enjoying a boom. Every day sees the interest in the diggings grow, as the most encouraging reports are brought here. New diggings are reported in the old Forty Mile district, said to be very rich. Big prospects have been found and much prospecting is being done on American Creek. So great is the rush down there that a number of new towns have been started, the newest among them being Eagle City, at the mouth of Mission Creek, into which American Creek flows. Star City was the original of the place, but it was so badly washed out by the spring flood that the inhabitants moved up the river a little way and re-established and called the new town Eagle.

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