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NEWS FROM AN UNEXPLORED REGION.

A LETTER FROM THE FAR NORTH.

We have been favored with a communication of the highest interest. The following letter, a copy of which was kindly lent us by the person to whom it was written, describes the winter quarters of a large party—60 in number—of prospectors who headed for Dawson City by the Mackenzie River route more than a year ago. After descending the great river to the Arctic Sea they ascended the Peel River district to the point which they christened Wind City. This letter, which took over eight months to reach its destination in Winnipeg, is much more graphic than a letter of the same date from another member of the same expedition published in a recent number of the Montreal Star.

WIND CITY, Nov. 14, 1898.

Like Aeneas of old I have built me a city and reside therein. I presume, however, I had better acquaint you with our journey from the time of our departure from Fort McPherson. We had great luck for a while after leaving the dirty hill and its non-descript fort—actually sailed 60 miles. The current then becoming too swift to make headway with sails we took to tracking, that is, drawing the boat with ropes from shore in canal-horse style. In this way we succeeded in making another 60 miles; then the weight of the boat was too much for our limited crew. There was nothing to do but rebuild, so the old "Imisk" was consumed and phoenix-like from her remains arose two smaller boats. Our boat building took two weeks, so that it was August 2 before we were ready to tackle the stiff current again. From the ship yard to our present location we have worked like galley slaves. We could not carry more than 2,500 pounds at a time; so that each 10 miles meant 30 to us, having to make three trips, not to mention the running back with the current. There are 60 men in Wind City, of all classes and nations (Besant and Rice might look this way for a sequel to "All sorts and conditions of men"), and among them old chaps that crossed the plains to California, but all agreed in saying that our work on the river was the most difficult they had ever seen.

We were continually in the water for hours at a time, and when one got up in the morning it was only to put on wet clothes and resume the old drudgery. Then the banks were precipitous in places, compelling one to crawl along for a foothold, all the time with a strap attached to your shoulders on which you were obliged to strain to pull Mrs. Boat up. There was continual danger of being pulled off the bank by an unskilful steersman exposing suddenly an extra foot of boat to the current, in fact a couple of poor chaps have lonely graves on the river, being dragged off the bank and drowned. Then there was the landslide which seems to be of daily occurrence on this river, and one had to keep a sharp look out to prevent being struck by falling

stones. The water and bad travelling played the deuce with our clothes and boots; I wore out one pair of boots in three days. We usually got away by 8 in the morning and stopped for the night between 6 and 7. It was customary to build a big fire and attempt the drying process, but as we had continual rains during September, the order of things was more usually wet blankets than dry clothes. It was astonishing what quantities of beans, pork, etc., one could get away. I was troubled at meal times lest I should not have time enough to eat all I wanted to. Under these conditions I have actually grown fat although I worked like a negro, and consequently am looked upon with due respect by all residents of our Arctic City. We reached our present position on Sept. 25, and there being quantities of good wood in the vicinity; and the weather having turned wintry (so that we had snow on the ground, while the water was very cold) we decided to build our winter quarters here. We have 15 houses all told, of course built of logs, but really very comfortable. We cut down the trees and shaped the logs so that the ends fitted, filled up cracks with moss and clay and whip sawed lumber for floor and inside boarding. It took us 10 days to put up our shack. It is 14 by 12. On the front side is the door in one corner, the fire place (open) in the other, and in the centre the window, underneath the window the cook stove, then the beds, raised two feet from the floor with mattresses of pine boughs, are at the back of the shack, forming three sides of a square, the table between them, while the walls are lined with shelves, etc., from which our household goods hold forth in dumb show. Our goods are stowed in the tent which is pitched 10 yards from the window and protected by a log barricade. I am enclosing you a map which we have compiled and which will give you a good idea of our exact situation. We figure ourselves to be about 100 miles east and 60 miles north of Dawson City in a straight line, and it is possible that some one from our camp may proceed thither this winter; this necessitates, however, an Indian guide, and we are not sure whether we may be able to get hold of one. We are all subscribing to send down this mail to McPherson. The great question on the tapis at present is whether we should build toboggans or sleighs for our trip up the pass. We went three miles inland and secured some very good birch. This winter travelling is going to be severe but we must succeed in getting our goods up whilst the snow furnishes us with a mode of procedure. The mean temperature since we have been here has been 18½ degrees below zero, although we have had it as cold as 42 below; in spite of this the river is not completely frozen over yet, the current being so swift; in fact we pulled the boat up places where there was a fall of 42 feet in half a mile (no rapid), and of course the nearer we get to its source the swifter the old stream gets. I suppose you will wonder how we were able to compile the map I enclose when we have only got 10 miles up the Wind River. The knowledge of the pass was so important to us, however, that shortly after building our boats we sent

up a party of six men to explore and report. These men carried food to last them two months and went in light marching order with a skin boat (a frame work of wood with moose skin stretched over it); they penetrated as far as the pass and saw the water flowing in the other direction. The observation on the map above Windy City refers to their expedition. These men also report the country full of game, herds of cariboo and moose were seen, and bears and wolves abounded; in fact even this far down we have secured game of all kinds. I have shot moose and caribou, but have not brought down my grizzly yet; in fact the majority of men here, though reckless enough fellows as a rule, hesitate about tackling a grizzly. The reported size of some of these monsters seen by residents of our city is almost incredible, and moreover at this time of the year we meet only old staggers as the younger bears hibernate. It is customary for us to hunt in pairs in this country as one can never tell what he may run across. Last week, however, I took my rifle and travelled alone some 10 miles up a ravine at the back of the city; I had no luck, however, and sat down to rest awhile before turning back. I was sitting on a slight elevation on the right side of the ravine under a pine and happening to look back the way I had come, I saw something following in the path I had made. I thought at first it was a dog from the camp, but as it got nearer I saw that it was too large for a dog—and must be a timber wolf. These timber wolves are usually too cowardly to attack a man but in the winter sometimes become desperate from hunger. This chap was evidently tracking me, the hunter was being hunted. I got behind the pine and thought I would wait until my friend was sufficiently close to make sure of him. He got wind of me, however, and stopped about 40 yards away. I shot as soon as he stopped and he fell, but got up again at once and started up the side of the ravine. I pursued him now in turn, there being blood upon the snow. I could not, however, keep up with the gentleman, the snow being some two feet deep, so started for home. I reached camp at 7 o'clock, long after darkness had set in. We followed the tracks the next day and found some bones in a pine wood about three miles from the ravine. There had evidently been a tragedy enacted and we gathered from the trampled state of the snow that some of his brethren had taken advantage of his wounded condition and eaten him. I looked back frequently on my return trip that night and had an uneasy feeling that one of those long grey creatures was still on my track. This is the only hunting experience that I have to date that was exciting. I had a couple of dips on the river, however, in which my swimming stood me in good stead. Frequently the boat would run on bars and of course would have to be worked off before we could proceed. I usually returned from the track line, got my shoulder under the rim and heaved her off. When one felt her floating again he would shout and the man on the track line would start again; however, this premature starting would frequently merely result in running the boat on again if the bar

was a long one, so I had got accustomed to walk out to where the bar ended (so that the steersman would know where to head for) before I shoved off, I proceeded to do this one day in a rapid. I was walking in water about a foot deep when suddenly the sand gave way and in I went. Of course the men on the shore were helpless, the steersman tried to give me a rope, but the current carried me down too quickly. When I saw the way things were going I let the current take me, which it only did near the opposite shore, where I landed in due course. I walked up above the rapids and allowing for the drift, swam across again, and although I went in wet clothes until night never suffered any evil consequences. Our time here is by no means hanging on our hands. In the first place we have to get wood, sawing down trees and splitting them for the grate, which must be kept going night and day on account of cold; then cooking, and housekeeping takes a little time (we cook week about and I can bake excellent bread), then our daylight is very scarce, lasting just now, from 10 to 3 only, and of course will be less shortly. We attempted to sink pits for gold but were stopped by the water, in fact, this gold, the chief object of our expedition, is not yet attained. The skin boat expedition found one color the size of a pin's head.

Of course we have not labored hard as yet to get gold, our work being to get our goods and selves into the gold region. In this I think we have been very successful especially as we were continually told on the way down the McKenzie that it was absolutely impossible to get up the Peel. We are all looking forward to a good search for the yellow metal at the head waters of the Stewart.

I expect to be much improved not only in health but in knowledge also, by the time we reach Dawson City. We have literary meetings in the city every Friday, when singing, recitations, etc., are in order. Lectures on astronomy, navigation, and medicine have been given. We have bi-weekly classes in French, German and telegraphy, and in fact our city bids fair to become a second Boston. If we have not got Browning, we have at any rate beans. There are five doctors and four lawyers in the city including myself. We had a mock trial the other day in which I acted for the crown. Dr. Brown, a Stratford man, but who is in command of an American expedition with us, is sending contributions to the Stratford Herald describing the trip up, etc. I have asked him to request the editor to forward you a copy which will doubtless interest you. — and — want me to ask you to have some one telephone to — in Winnipeg and give their regards to —, saying also that they are in the best of health and spirits. We are only sending out one letter each, as every half pound counts travelling over the snow, and the boys have 250 miles to cover to reach Dawson. I have received no mail since I left Athabasca Landing and am in great hopes of receiving some on the return of the men from McPherson. One feels so infernally cut off from everyone in this snowbound land. "Darkness broodeth over the earth" in all truth, and one longs for a good sunshiny day. We have, however, some beauti-

ful nights with the northern lights flashing over the heavens in a thousand brilliant colors. The atmosphere is so crisp that we can hardly believe that it is so far below zero, but we are toughened, I expect. I know that on our last trips down the river, although it was freezing, I was walking in Highland costume as far as my legs were concerned, that is, I had on only a pair of trousers, cut off at the knees so as not to hamper me in the water; socks and boots. In this rig I could walk in the icy water without feeling the cold after the first dip, my legs would get red merely, but then, of course one was taking extreme exercise in pulling the boats, as the strain never relaxed.

Christmas, I am afraid, will be extremely like the centre piece in the New York Life, which I glanced at so casually last Christmas at —. I want you to consider this very patched up tale as a family possession and send it to —. Doubtless you will not receive this epistle much before next spring, but on receipt please write me at Dawson. I am most anxious to hear from you all. I would send Christmas greetings, but they would seem absurd to you in May. I expect to find letters for me at Dawson and will let you know immediately I reach there. I figure we have enough food to last us for another year. If we find good paying dirt we will probably get provisions sent in to us in some way or other and stay and work our claims out if we find little or nothing. I will be in Dawson City next September. Do not worry about me, I can hold my own very easily. I know that this last year has only increased my knowledge in general and made me more fit to hold up my head anywhere. We may be looked upon as Arctic explorers, being the first white men, the pioneers in this section of our country.

THE NEW POLISH CHURCH.

A meeting of some of the aldermen, some Roman Catholic clergymen and several residents of Selkirk street was held Wednesday afternoon in the vicinity of the new Catholic church, which is being erected on Selkirk, near Aikins street. The object of the gentlemen was to settle the question of closing the lane running parallel between Selkirk and Pritchard streets. The church authorities own a solid block of twelve lots extending between these two streets and want the lane closed to make room for the church. In return they offer a lane of equal width on the west side of their property, which gives free access onto both Selkirk and Pritchard streets. For some unaccountable reason the residents object to this and a spirited meeting was the result. Alderman Mitchell spoke in favor of the church's proposition and showed how it was giving 4,200 square feet of land in exchange for 3,500 feet, without any inconvenience to the residents. The matter will probably be discussed again as no conclusion was arrived at. Meanwhile Father Kulawy continues the erection of his church, merely cutting off from the chancel the five feet that encroached upon the lane.