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The Engineer & the Road to the Yukon Gold Fields.

By Harrington Emerson.

[The following article, which was written in March last, deals with matters from a United States standpoint, which makes all the more forcible the remarks about the difference between the policies of the Canadian & U. S. governments in regard to aids to navigation & in attention to frontier matters. The admission that the White Pass & Yukon Ry. will divert the trade of the Yukon from U. S. to Canadian channels is significant. We are inclined to think Mr. Emerson is misinformed as to what he terms the annoyances & extortions of the Canadian customs officials at Log Cabin. If such abuses existed formal complaint would undoubtedly have been made. Since the article was written the W. P. & Y. Ry. has been completed to Lake Bennett, 41 miles from Skagway, & is now in operation, giving connection at Bennett with the river steamer service to Dawson. —EDITOR.]

He who leaves what is generally termed the Pacific Coast for the Klondike & the Alaskan gold fields, enters another world when he boards the north-bound steamer. It is not that the vessel differs from steamers of the same tonnage on the Atlantic Coast, for the engineer's handiwork must be more perfect for voyages to the outlying places of the earth where there are no repair shops. It is the passengers who make a different world, or perhaps it is fairer to say that among them the conventions of civilized life lose their force, & the sordidness & other elemental & unlovely instincts which civilization hides but does not eradicate, crop up unblushingly. A good part of the men northward bound are miners, animated not by patriotism nor hope of homestead, not by dream of glory, nor love of science, not by pride of conquest nor religious enthusiasm, not even by the pleasure of adventure, but impelled northwards solely by lust of gold. Dogging the footsteps of these pioneers is the motley horde of human parasites & beasts of prey, both male & female, & these & their ways emphasize the difference between the lust for gold & the pursuit of immaterial riches. No one tries to rob Dewey of his laurels nor Nansen of the honor due his adventures & discoveries, but if a man has secured an ounce of gold a thousand rise up in his path & try to take it away from him.

Owing to the absence of parasites, industrial, criminal & governmental, it was cheaper & safer to go to the Yukon ten years ago

than it was when the great work was on, & were it not for the works of the engineer, the passage down or up the Yukon would to-day be lined with as many robber roosts, levying blackmail, euphemiously called toll, on all the travel & traffic, as was the Rhine in the Middle Ages. But the engineer, with his ocean steamers, wharves, railroads, aerial cableways, river boats, etc., came & converted what was once an expedition of extreme physical danger & hardship, & what next became a journey of extreme pecuniary danger & expense, into a rapid, safe, convenient & also

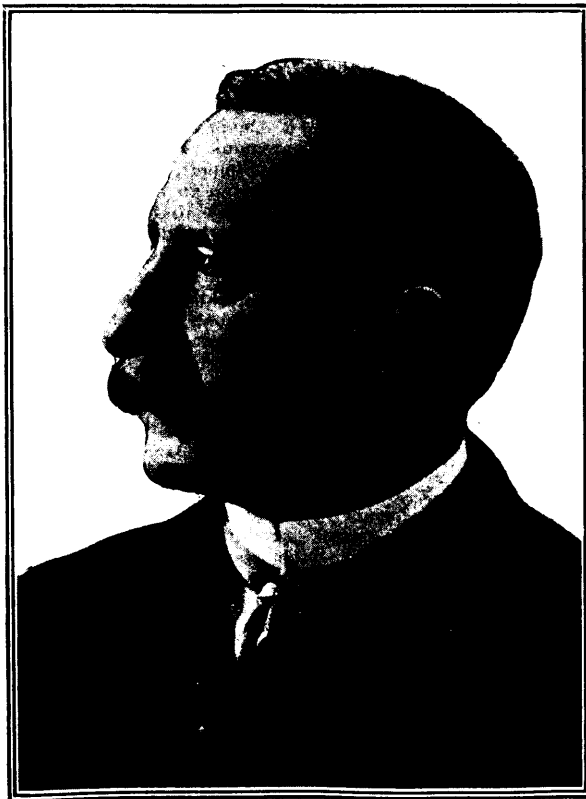
The most remarkable part of the long road to the new gold fields is the short link which crosses the backbone of the continent. Elsewhere, the continental divide lies in Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, but in southeastern Alaska, it is a rampart rising direct from the sea. At its base lie the blue waters of an arm of the Pacific. Fourteen miles inland is the summit, & immediately beyond are the head waters of the Yukon. A few coast passes are the only feasible highroads to the interior, & this gives them very great political as well as commercial importance. Further north between the

Yukon & the ocean are those stupendous snow giants, Mount Saint Elias & Mount Logan, towering about 18,000 ft. in height.

The profiles here given, showing the two lowest passes from ocean to river, were drawn from his own surveys by Frank Reid, the engineer, who, at Skagway, in 1898, in the cause of decency, order & law, shot & killed "Soapy Smith," the leader of all the crooks & thugs with which the place was infested, & was in turn killed by him. Of all the many dead claimed by the dangers & diseases or the murderous trails, Reid alone rests under an imposing monument, erected in the forlorn little cemetery to show the gratitude of the citizens & as a permanent warning to evil-doers. The man was honored who had saved the town from a reign of terror, but the engineer began a greater work in his surveys, which were the beginning of a development, that in 18 months replaced the Indian hunter's foot-path with aerial cableways & a steam railway.

The profiles are worth studying. Lynn Canal is an inlet or fjord of the Pacific Ocean, & the lakes over the summits are the head lakes of the Yukon River. Although these summits are but 14 miles from the ocean, the distance down the Yukon to Bering Sea is 2,000 miles. Nowhere else in the world are the navigable head waters of a great river so near the same ocean into which it finally empties. It is as if the headwaters of the Ohio River were but 14 miles from New York Bay.

From Panama to the Fuca Straits there are but few harbors, but from Puget Sound northwards a whole coast system of mountains & valleys sank, in a former geologic age, several thousand feet, & thus formed the present sounds, canals, channels, inlets, bays, harbors, a land-locked water-way of marvelous beauty—& danger—stretching a thousand miles north of the sound cities, Tacoma, Seattle, Victoria & Vancouver. So smooth & placid is this water-way that Indians, in their dugouts, undertake trips of 1,000 & more miles along the coast, yet so dangerous is it that scarcely a week passes without some steamer striking or stranding on the dark



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cheap trip to the Arctic Circle. It is this cheapness that above all else will develop the resources of that far off region, making profitable great numbers of mines to-day unworkable. In California gravels containing as little as 5c of gold to the cubic yard are washed at a profit, but in the Klondike region all gravel that yields less than \$15 a cubic yard is mined at a loss. It is too much to expect that far northern gravels can ever be worked as cheaply as in California, but it is not too much to expect that with cheaper labor, cheaper supplies, & above all, better appliances, five dollar gravels will in time have value.