

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 1898.

The Klondike's Wonders.

News Brought By An Experienced Miner From Dawson City.

The Winter Mild—Costly Lots and Log Cabins—Dawson City's Morals—Danger of Pestilence—Men Who Have Made Fortunes—The Outlook—Advice to Gold Hunters.

There has been many descriptions printed of the Klondike region but the best that Progress has seen was told by Charles E. Stillman to a New York Sun reporter. So many friends of Progress readers have gone to this region of gold that will be glad to read such an interesting and apparently unbiased account of life in that country. Mr. Stillman made a quick trip from the Klondike region to southeastern Alaska, having left Dawson City on Jan. 23, and arrived at Skagway on Feb. 16. He learned in Dawson City last January that Mrs. Stillman was ill at the family home, and leaving his mining property in charge of his brother, he started overland as fast as possible, with two guides and a train of dogs for the coast and thence for California. Mr. Stillman is one of the best known gold miners on the Pacific coast. He has been State Treasurer of Nevada, was superintendent under John W. Mackay of the Bonanza mines on the Comstock lode, and has been mining gold and silver since 1866. He went to the Klondike last July, as an expert representing a syndicate of Oregon miners, who bought three claims on Hunker Creek for \$100,000 cash down. He brought with him fifty pounds of gold dust, worth about \$13,000, and delivered it to the syndicate by which he is employed.

"That is about one third the gold we had got out from our mines up to the time I came away," says Mr. Stillman. "It will probably be \$80,000 for the year from our three placer claims, when we shall have finished sluicing the gravel next June." Mr. Stillman has been an object of interest among the army of gold hungry men assembling from all over the world on this coast and making ready for going to the Klondike region. His long experience in gold mining and his opportunities to observe the possibilities of the Klondike have made him the very sort of person that the thousands of Klondike wild men out here want to interview. In Seattle he was kept up all night at his hotel by crowds of men, who importuned him for information about the chances of fortune plying in the new gold region. Here in Los Angeles Mr. Stillman has been constantly surrounded by a crowd of men, who are planning to join the stampede to Alaska during the next sixty days.

"The present winter in Dawson City and that region has been somewhat milder than in former years," said Mr. Stillman. "The Indians say that the ice will begin to break up in the Yukon at the last of June this year. That will about a fortnight earlier than usual. There have been a few hours this season when the temperature at our diggings on Hunker Creek has been down to 63° below zero, and for four days at New Year's time the mercury never rose above 44° below zero. The wind, which blows here all winter long, blow very hard at that time. No Californian used to a perennially mild climate can even imagine what such winter means. The day I left Dawson City the mercury was at about 24° below zero, and the people regarded that as a pretty mild sort of day. The ice is a yard thick in the Yukon and on all the creeks in the Klondike region. The snow is about two feet on the level, and very deep in drifts caused by the everlasting blow from the north-east. There have been many ears and faces frozen among the people in and about Dawson City in the last few months. I have heard of about twenty people who have lost their lives by freezing, but there may be a lot more unfortunates who have died of freezing in their cabins and tents away off on the banks of creeks miles from friends. Josquin Miller, who is in Dawson City, thought he was going to lose one of his ears by freezing when I saw him a few days before I set out for California. I believe there has been a score of amputations of frozen legs and feet on the Klondike this season."

"How much of an area has been covered by gold miners' camps on the Klondike? Oh, about 100 miles square would cover it. The Canadian register of Mines at Dawson City told me six weeks ago that the mines furthest from Dawson were located about sixty miles away. When I got to the Klondike last August the furthest were not twenty miles from Dawson City. We old-time miners have long seen

in the west what man will do and the risks he will take to get gold at any hazard, but the way hundreds of men have gone tramping along the banks of creeks and across trackless snowy wastes miles from another human being, and in a way below-zero weather, to prospect and snow and ice for gold-bearing gravel, has always struck me as having ever told to illustrate man's insatiable thirst for gold. Bonanza, Hunker, Eldorado, Too Much Gold, and Sookum Creeks were completely occupied by miners' claims from source to mouth, while all the tributary streams for miles round were well claimed.

Since the last steamer went down the Yukon from Dawson City last September, the tenderest on the Klondike have been locating on dozens of tiny creeks further and further away from the original gold finds. There are now so many new creeks found and located upon that the average person there does not try to remember them any longer. That there will be another city like Dawson City in the Klondike is not doubted by any one up there. If the miners on the newly located claims and the miners who will go into the Klondike this coming season strike any degree of richness, a city that will outgrow Dawson seems likely. Dawson is too far away from the newer claims to be a base of supplies for the mining camps there. I know several rich real estate men who are now on their way to Skagway, and they are going to speculate in lots in new towns sited in the mining region. If they are lucky they will make more money and do it quicker than the luckiest miners. Just think, in September, 1896, you could have bought a lot in Dawson City for \$300 or \$300 each—perhaps less. To day lots there with a thirty-foot frontage bring \$3,000 and \$4,000 each. Some lots bring \$10,000 and \$15,000 each.

"The population of Dawson City, and the camps that line the creeks that twist away south, east and southwest from the Klondike and Yukon is as intelligent as any I have ever known in any mining camp in the West. Indeed, it is the most moral and ambitious mining population I have ever seen. A number of us professional miners up there, who have seen the gilded gambling palaces of Virginia City and have lived in the hot days of Boatie, Tombstone, Anaconda, and Creole, have remarked many times that the miners of the Klondike are a finer race of men from those we used to know in the States. To be sure, there is gambling and liberal drinking of the hardest of hard whiskey in Dawson City and Circle City, but the scenes are never comparable with what we used to witness every night when the Bonanza were pouring out their golden wealth and Tombstone was making a dozen new millionaires."

The Klondike miners are not the typical, picturesque miners the world has been hearing about for half a century. It is my private opinion that the awful hardships one endures to get rich up there, the dangers that must be braved, and the privations suffered in getting to the new gold fields by any route, make men there sober and provident. Where men have these characteristics there is no chance taken in gambling. Then, too, the expense of getting to Klondike and the necessary expenditure of several hundred dollars for an outfit keep out of the Alaskan mining region a horde of hard-up, desperate characters similar to those that have made all the Western mining camps so notoriously bad. I doubt if Dawson City ever will be a hard, reckless, wide open town in the sense that Virginia City and Cripple Creek have been. It has a population of about 2,800 men and 120 women all winter, with about 4,600 more miners in the cabins along the creeks, and there have been few more orderly and earnest communities anywhere in the Union. The stories that I see published in some newspapers about the orgies and immorality at Dawson City are almost wholly the fiction of imaginative reporters. I never knew so many well-educated, thoughtful, and promising men in any camp as there are at Dawson City today. Some are Harvard and Yale graduates. Two young women, wives of ambitious young miners, are from Vassar College, and a physician, who lives there in a log cabin, plastered with mud, was educated at Columbia College and at the University of Paris. I think he is contented. Anyhow, he ought to be for a year or two. He gets half an ounce of gold for each visit, and for simple surgical work his bill runs into ounces of gold very quickly. It seems to

me that he ought to clear up two or three pounds of gold every week in the ear."

"The stories of drinking and carousing at Dawson City are all booh. In the first place, it costs too much to drink even in the Klondike region. A drink of the vilest concoction of molasses and alcohol costs about \$1. In the second place, the wealth is earned by such hard work and exposure that one does not like to throw his earnings over the bar with the recklessness that characterizes the miners in the flash mining days of the West. Moreover, one may readily see that a climate where the wind blows and moans twenty hours out of every twenty four, and where the mercury travels between two degrees above zero and forty below for five months in the year, is not conducive to conviviality and hilarity as the warm, balmy climate of Tombstone and Virginia City were."

"Another, and perhaps the most important reason for the earnestness and soberness of Dawson City this winter, is that the danger of starvation in that Arctic region has been looking the Klondikers in the face. The last steamer of the season, the Weire, arrived at Dawson in the last week of September, and it had been expected there would be two or three steamers up the Yukon by that time, each boat having heavy supplies on board. The Canadian police were frightened and warned the Klondikers of the danger of starvation. Free transportation was furnished people at Dawson City to Fort Yukon and Circle City. At the last named places provisions were plentiful. The going away of some 1,000 men from Dawson at the approach of winter was a great help toward checking the scare of starvation. Very naturally, one who has any sense and the least fear of starvation in so hideously lonesome a place as the Klondike is not going to throw money away carelessly for whiskey and on games of chance."

"It will be wonderful if some mortal fever does not rage in Dawson next summer. If there was ever a community properly situated for the development of pestilence it is Dawson City. The town is located at the base of a mountain, on the northeast side of the mouth of the Klondike, on the Yukon River. At that point the Yukon is nearly half a mile wide. The mountains curtail the expansion of the town. The people now live almost as closely together as in a large city. Fancy what it will be by next July, when 150,000 people shall have set foot on that narrow bench along the river. There is no sewerage or drainage, no water supply from an uncontaminated source and no attention is paid to simple hygiene in that land of quick fortune making. Around the base of the mountain to the west is an area of several hundred acres of marsh land and one can see the malaria-laden vapor rising like steam from an engine in a midsummer morning. Even in the warmest weather one can dig down through the heavy layer of mud and a foot or two in the spongy soil in Dawson City and find ice a half foot thick. Last summer the 1,200 people at Dawson City were more or less ill with malaria and there were a few deaths from fever. The mosquitoes rise during the months of June, July and August in swarms from the moss that abounds everywhere in the Klondike region, and they are so atrocious that mules and dogs have run away and leaped madly over embankments many times to escape them."

Dawson City has been growing right along all winter. An occasional dip of the mercury to 42° to 50° below zero has had no effect on the building operations there. All winter long Front street—practically the only one in Dawson City—has resounded with the sound of chopping and hammering on new houses and stores. I think that this building improvements of the town six weeks ago, when I left Dawson City, comprised about 115 log cabins, three log churches—Catholic, Episcopal and Methodist—and 600 tents, that had been boarded up about the bottom to make them more agreeable to the occupants. The business part of the town consists of log and crude pine board buildings arranged in a straight line and close beside one another. In these structures are fifteen saloons, two barber shops, several butcher shops and half a dozen restaurants, two real estate offices and one hardware store.

The largest buildings in that region are two substantial storehouses built by the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Transportation Company. Each is two stories high, and covers about 8,000 square feet. To show how it costs to build up there, I have only to say that one of these storehouses, with a good concrete foundation cost exactly \$93,500 last September. The same structure could be built in the middle state for about \$4,000, and on the Pacific coast for \$1,500. Log cabins 20x24 feet cost from \$3,000 to \$1,500. The logs are hewn on three sides and the chinks are plugged with mud and moss. The roofs are constructed of three layers of pine boards, upon which moss and earth

are packed to the depth of a foot. Earth is banked up about the walls of the cabin. That keeps out the cold. Some roofs have upon them earth and moss a yard thick. In summer the mosquitoes rise out of these roofs in swarms like the Egyptian locust plagues. Let me recite some of the current prices in Dawson City. Pine logs, \$2 50 and \$3 00 each; window glass, 50 cents a pound; meat, 75 cents a pound; carpenters who can do fairly good work get \$18 and \$20 a day this winter; common laborers get three-quarters of an ounce of gold a day—about \$12. A small lot of wheat bread has cost 60 cents all winter in Dawson, and for a short time the price was 75 cents. I bought a pair of stogy boots last January for three ounces of gold, worth \$48. And I can buy similar boots here for \$3. No cigars or drinks are less than 50 cents each. Bartenders get from \$12 to 25 a day. By the way, a common courtesy in the saloons there is the one who calls his friends to the bar to hand his pocket bookskin sack of gold dust across the bar to the bartender, and permit the latter to weigh out enough gold on the scales, which are found in every business place in that region, to pay the bill for the drinks."

"One of the greatest money makers in Dawson is a young man, Dan Flynn, who built from his barburg, Pa. He is just 22, and he is a natural born business man. He has nothing to do with the mines, and never even saw one. He's all business. He happened to be at Dyea, on the coast of Alaska last June as a cigar agent, when the news came there of the Klondike gold discoveries. He quit his job and sent word to his firm in Chicago that he was going to Dawson City. He got there early and sold all the 10 cent cigars he had for \$1 50 each. He saw the money there was in town lots, and took written sixty day options on a dozen lots, paid \$500 down, and in less than twenty days he sold out and made \$20,000 cash. He knew that an army of gold seekers would soon be there, so he took options on more lots at greatly advanced prices. Besides, he bought springs of drinking water near Dawson City and hired Indians to peddle water at 25 cents a pail. Then he went into the bread business. He has now over 200 pounds of gold ready for shipment to San Francisco when navigation on the Yukon opens. He will sell tens of thousands of pails of water in Dawson at 25 cents each this coming summer. Flynn is easily worth \$100,000 now, and he may double it in another year. He has the Irish wit and is very popular in Dawson. He will soon open a bank there, backed by a San Francisco mill on note."

"Have there been any notably rich discoveries on the newly found creeks in the past few months?"

"Yes, some were made last November on Columbia Creek, a tiny stream which flows into the Eldorado Creek, about thirty-five miles southeast from Dawson City. All Dawson City was excited, and with reason, last December, by the reports of rich finds on an extension of French Creek. There was wild excitement and December over the news that came of discoveries of gold that ran \$9 to the pan on Sulphur Creek. A company of three greenhorn Swedes, who joined the rush to the Klondike from Victoria, B. C., last August, have stumbled on a fortune on French Creek, where several experienced miners had prospected with indifferent results a month before. I have heard that these Swedes have three claims. They struck a bed-rock eleven feet below the surface of the gravel. Gravel that ran \$5 to the pan has been very common with them. They are reported to have washed out by the slow and patient panning process \$2,000 worth of gold in three weeks. James W. Phelps, formerly a bookkeeper for Phil Armour in Chicago, dropped his work and went Klondikeward last August. He got a friendly tip from a man in Dawson City the very night he reached there. He located on Bear Creek. He

had a five-gallon coal oil can filled with dust in his cabin when I heard from him last, about Jan. 1, and he has a small mountain of gravel heaped up on his claim ready for sluicing when the spring thaw comes. He was very ill at one time from his hard work and poor food and came very near giving his life for his golden fortune. The very richest find that has become generally known in Dawson City this winter is one on Binder Creek. It was by Mack Binder, who has been chasing the elusive goddess of fortune for twenty or more years in Oregon and Idaho. He has been a perfect type of the poor, ragged, hopeful prospector ever since I first saw him about 1878. He went up to Dawson on the same craft with me, and it seemed pitiful that he should have so much hope on such slender foundation. He had about \$600 invested in his outfit. The old man prospected over and down several creeks and camped one night in an unnamed creek. He dug a prospect hole four feet deep there and got color from the first. At the bottom of the hole he got \$7 and \$8 to the pan. The old fellow went almost crazy at the thought that at last, after a lifetime of searching, he had found gold and was rich for life. He told me recently that he was sure he would clean up about \$90,000 by next July, and I have no doubt it will run over that figure. He has as rich a claim as there is in that locality. Binder is the only one of the 200 men on the craft in which he went up the Yukon that has struck it rich, so far as I know."

"Oh, yes, I believe all the claims on El Dorado, Bonanza, Bear Hunker, All Gold, Gold Bottom and the other creeks of which the American people heard such wonderful stories last summer and fall are still paying well. The greater number of the mines discovered and located in 1896 are yielding increased net returns now. The miners have improved processes of mining in the Klondike and the waste of gold dust has been largely checked. The famous claims Nos. 4, 5 and 6, owned by Clarence Berry of Fresno, Cal., on El Dorado Creek, yielded during the first year's operation \$130,000 in gold. Berry sold the stuff at the San Francisco mint last August. The same claim will yield \$200,000 in this, the second year of its operation. There are other mines that are doing proportionately well this year. A few have not done this season nearly so well as a year ago. No one dare predict how these placers will do in the third year of their operation."

"It is generally conceded in Dawson City that Bonanza Creek is the richest in the whole Klondike region. It is no use for people to go prospecting there now. Every foot of the benches on either side of the creek from source to mouth has been taken up. This creek was where George Carmack, the Yankee squaw man, made the original Klondike gold discovery in August 1896. There are 116 claims on Bonanza Creek and an average of twelve men to each claim are employed there. The Canadian authorities at Dawson were recently figuring that \$800,000 in gold from Bonanza Creek was sent to the United States last summer and that \$1,000,000 will be sent from the creek in 1898."

Frank Cobb of Lowell, Mass., who was once a Harvard football man, and went to the Yukon in 1895, is still taking out gold on Bonanza Creek. It is rumored that he has 300 pounds of gold ready for shipment to San Francisco next summer. That's worth about \$77,000. He has put much capital in elaborate sluices and I would not be surprised to see him clean up \$50,000 or \$60,000 before August."

"What are the chances for an average man who knows nothing about mining and goes to the Klondike now?"

"They are not nearly so good as they were for the average man who came to

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