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A RAILWAY TO THE KLONDIKE.

BY W. M. SHEFFIELD.

FOR less than three years streams of humanity have been pouring into the interior of Alaska. The soil of that country, with that of the adjacent northern portions of British Columbia and the Northwest Territory, is now considered as among the most precious of the earth, and its sections are in eager demand on the exchanges of New York, London and Paris, bought and sold with greater facility than has ever been the case with the mines of South Africa and Australia. Up to the time that gold was discovered in the now famous Klondike valley, little was known of Alaska, even by the government authorities at Washington. Official information was obtained through the revenue cutter service, and with inadequate means at its disposal, its reports were known to be inaccurate, and the government maps to show an incorrect coast-line.

When it came to the interior, it may be said that the topography was largely a matter of the map-maker's imagination, but there was no one to challenge it. Several men penetrated the territory in the early years of our occupation, but their

reports told little that could be used as a basis of accurate statement. In later years a few adventurous individuals ascended the Yukon from St. Michaels, others crossed Chilkoot pass and descended the river by the chain of lakes. Most of these pioneers sought the solitude of the north as a result of failure and disappointment, or were driven from civilization because they were no longer useful members of society. What white men they found in Alaska were descendants of the hardy Hudson Bay trappers and hunters, who had formed a chain of settlements throughout the country at the time of Russian occupation or immediately after the purchase by the United States. But these men cared little for and contributed nothing to a knowledge of our great possession in the north. We did not learn to know Alaska until it became worth while, until its secret was wrested from the soil, and it became the great magnet for the world's unstable population.

There are large sections of Alaska, on the mainland, in the interior and on its many islands, suitable for agricultural pursuits—an economic fact upon whose appreciation

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