NOME AND THE GOLD FIELDS OF THE SEWARD PENINSULA

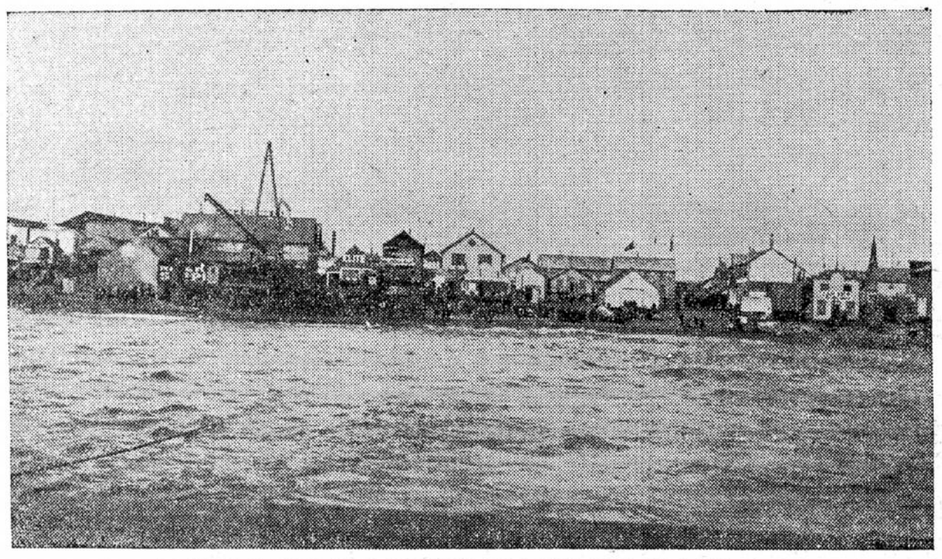
A Visit to the Benches of Anvil Creek, Where They Gather Gold By the Panful.

Nome's Hospitable Reception of the Senatorial Party—Swell Social Function—The Strain of the Long Winter on Personal Friendships—An Eight Thousand Dollar Clean-up—Serious Defects of the Mining Laws—Gold Mining a Permanent Industry in Alaska.

VII.

TAKE a low, sandy beach, one without a tree within fifty miles; show a white line where the waves break into foam along the shore; stretch along the water's edge for a mile or more a double row of frame buildings, most of them two stories high and facing each other; cover the street between with boards laid on the sand; don't be very particular about making the street lines straight nor insist that the street shall have uniform width; let the elevation and the width of the sidewalks be determined by chance, it produces more variety and claims closer attention from the pedestrian; fill the lower floors of the buildings along this street with business undertakings of various kinds, and the upper floors reserve for living purposes; throw in a liberal portion of places devoted to the gratification of highly developed thirsts; fill the air at frequent intervals with the sounds of rag-time music; gather on the sidewalk and in the narrow streets groups of men who seem to have nothing in particular to do and are doing it; then go back from the first street and locate a church or two, a schoolhouse, a federal courthouse and custom-house, sprinkle around a few small buildings for residence purposes; fill the air with a cold drizzle, and you may have the materials out of which were obtained my first impressions of Nome, on the morning of July 29.

Nome is on the south shore of the Seward peninsula, that portion of Alaska which reaches farthest out toward Siberia, and is only 120 miles from Cape Prince of Wales, the extreme point on the Alaskan coast between which and the Siberian shore flows Bering strait. The name Bering strait recalls those impressions we used to get from our school geographies. I don't know what your youthful ambitions were, but Bering sea and all that belongs to it were associated in my mind with remoteness more unattainable than the highlands of Thibet or the jungles of Africa. But that was long before the magnet of gold began to draw thousands across that bleak and stormy water, before the soldiers of fortune began to storm the icy palisades of the north, and sweep thru the watery pass into the Arctic ocean and explore its inhospitable shores, not for fame or knowledge, but for the precious yellow metal.



SECTION OF THE CITY OF NOME AS SEEN FROM THE SEA.

NOME is something of a summer resort judging not by its attractions for pleasureseekers, but solely by the fluctuations in population. About 2,500 people spent the winter there last year and as many will be there next winter, but the arrivals during the summer were nearly 5,000. Not all of them, of course, remain in Nome any considerable length of time, but this greatest and most wonderful and most interesting of Alaskan cities is the gateway thru which arrive and depart the thousands who are scattered over the richest gold field of equal area on the American continent, and probably the richest in the world, the Seward peninsula.

I have spoken in a previous article of its deplorable lack of harbor facilities and protection for shipping, and if there were any other point on the south shore of this peninsula any better favored in this particular it would sooner or later, and not much later, take the place Nome now occupies with respect to the Alaskan trade. It was the discovery of gold in the beach sands and on the creeks near by which determined the location of this city; there was no other influence at work in it. While the boom is over and the multitudes attracted by the first discoveries and the chance to stand on the beach and wash out $100 to $500 a day have melted away, thousands of tons of merchandise are received here every week, supplying the 12,000 to 15,000 people who are scattered over the peninsula; and of the $5,000,000 of gold sent out of Alaska annually nine-tenths of it goes out of Nome.

THE reception accorded the senatorial party at Nome was hospitality itself. This was the first stopping place since leaving Dawson, where there were any considerable number of ladies. Here they had assumed the responsibility for a formal reception and ball the first night after our arrival. This very swell event took place in the Arctic Brotherhood hall, which was tastefully decorated for the occasion. This hall is the social center of Nome and the members of the brotherhood and their wives constitute the "400." Their hall was formerly a theater and, slightly remodeled, it provides splendid accommodations for every sort of social function. It is a kind of clubhouse and here the best element of Nome socially struggles almost nightly thru the long winter against thoughts of home and of the leagues of impassable ice and snow which lie between them and the outside world. Dancing and cards avail when more serious occupations fail to beguile the lonesome hours. For it should be understood that there is very little to do in Nome in winter. The mining has stopped almost entirely, the ships come no more, half the people have gone "outside"; the rest eat and sleep and amuse themselves and wait for summer to come again.

This is the situation from November to June. Add to this the fact that for a long time in winter the sun almost fails to come up, rises but a short distance above the ice pack of Bering sea and four hours later sinks out of sight again. The gloom of the long Arctic night contributes materially to the depression which at last overcomes the winter resident in spite of his effort to resist it. All these things, together with the close association of the inhabitants of this "desert island" produce a peculiar result. As one lady expressed it: "I get tired of my best friends, and I know that they get tired of me because they act like it. From cordial friendship and real enjoyment of each other at the beginning of the 'shut in' period, we come to tolerate and finally to feel a positive aversion for each other, till along in the spring when the days lengthen and the sun comes back and we can get out doors, and begin to count the weeks and then the days till the first ship may be expected—then we get over it and we are friends again."

THE Kegoayah Kozga, the woman's club of Nome, were hostesses at the ball. If you think this was a blue-flannel-shirt, pants-in-your-boots, cartridge-belt and knife-sheath affair, that shows how mistaken you are about Nome. There were a few men present who were not in evening dress, but very few, while the ladies had had time since the arrival of the first boats from the states, those of them who were in Nome all winter, to prepare the new dresses they had planned for this special event. It was a brilliant occasion and was certainly worth what it cost in the impression it gave to the senators of the kind of men and women there are in farthest Alaska.

For the banquet the next evening at the same place the hall was entirely redecorated. One hundred and twenty-five of the leading men sat down with the senatorial party and after a dinner served in first-class styie the requests and suggestions prepared by the general committee of citizens, as to legislation by congress, were formally presented. The extremely favorable impressions created the previous evening were strengthened by this well conducted and creditable affair. It is doubtful if anything observed or experienced during the entire trip of the senatorial party did more to promote the interests of Alaska than these social events at Nome, so well calculated to create the most favorable impressions with regard to the character of the people who are developing the resources of the great country, of whose natural wealth the general public has such inadequate knowledge.

SO much has been written about the wonderful results of washing the beach sands at Nome for gold and the beach sands proved to be so rich that the impression has prevailed in some quarters that not only has this been the source of the greater part of the gold output of the Nome district, but the important discoveries in this district are supposed to have been made first on the beach. This is not quite true, however. The first discovery of gold in the beach sands was made at Sinook, a point about twenty-five miles west of Nome. This led to some prospecting in the vicinity of Nome, but the prospectors were not then fortunate in finding in the beach sand paying quantities of gold, and they proceeded inland, where the first important discoveries were made on Anvil Creek and on Snow and Glacier gulches. H. L. Blake claims the credit for having made the original discovery. Some prospecting had been done in 1896 and 1897 in the region of Golofnin bay and on the streams flowing into it. Word was brought there, to a camp near the Swedish Lutheran mission, of discoveries of gold in the beach sands at Sinook. Blake made up a party, including Hultberg, the Swedish missionary, to investigate the Sinook rumors. They found nothing of importance there, and soon returned to the creeks above Nome. On the 26th and 27th of July, 1898, they prospected in that vicinity but staked no claims.

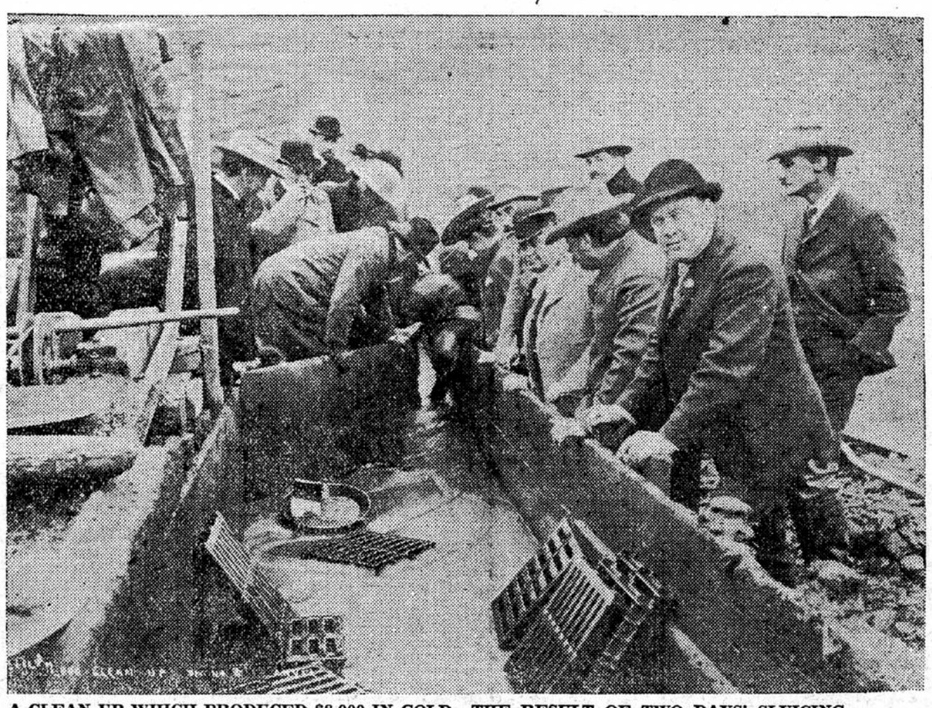
A little later the same season Erick C. Lindblom, John Brinterson and Jafet Linderburg went to Anvil creek, where they staked out claims. They also staked on Snow and Glacier gulches. These men were first to discover a sufficient quantity of gold in the Nome district to induce them to stake a claim, and are therefore entitled to be regarded as the real discoverers. Some of the claims they then staked proved to be very valuable, and were ultimately the properties over which occurred that famous litigation which resulted in the removal of Judge Arthur Noyes and United States Marshal MacKenzie from their official positions.

The bitter animosities which were developed between individuals and factions in Nome at that time were not exposed to the visiting senators, but they can be dug up very easily there at any time if one manifests the slightest interest in tales of woe.

THE second day in the Nome district was spent out on the creeks among the miners and prospectors. The Seward peninsula is just about as well equipped with good wagon roads as is all the rest of Alaska; that is to say, it hasn't any. Nome, however, has a railroad. It is nine miles long and "all under one management." It is called the Wild Goose railroad. A narrow-gage track laid over the tundra winds around among the hills and along the gulches, over which runs a light train made up of two side-gear locomotives adapted to steep grades, and covered so that they look like box cars, but capable of pulling a heavy load. The passenger "coaches" are flat cars, some with a roof and some without; but this little railroad is so much of an improvement over none at all that without it many of the claims within reach of it could not be profitably worked on account of the cost of transportation of supplies and machinery.

In a placer mining country a sufficient water supply is quite as essential to success as the gold itself, and at Nome two companies are engaged in building ditches and distributing water for use, not only on their own properties, but for sale to other mine owners. A pumping plant belonging to C. D. Lane's company stands near the railroad track about a mile and a half from Nome, from which point it is pumping water up into the mines eight or nine miles away and 800 feet higher up on Anvil Creek and Snow and Glacier gulches. Another company on the other side of Anvil mountain, the Campion company, is also constructing an immense system of ditches and providing for the distribution of water on a large scale. Such improvements as this not only suggest confidence in the permanency of the gold deposit, but they are establishing the only possible conditions under which the immense wealth of that rich, gold-bearing section may be successfully developed.

Near the end of the railroad the whole company left the train and mounted horses. Among the mines visited was Discovery, on Anvil creek, and in our company was Jafet Linderberg, one of the discoverers and locators of this claim. Linderberg is now a millionaire. When he started on the trip which led to this great discovery he was an employe of the government at one of the reindeer stations, from which service he obtained a release in order that he might engage in prospecting. He is a fine-looking, gentlemanly young fellow, exceedingly diffident, but a brief conversation with him developes the fact that he is a man of intelligence and capacity, a fact which helps explain his election to the presidency of the Pioneer Mining company, a strong corporation which owns Discovery and other valuable claims on Anvil and nearby creeks. Another interesting member of our company was Mr. Linderberg's bride, who was spending her honeymoon on the scene of her husband's very fortunate mining operations.



A CLEAN-UP WHICH PRODUCED $8,000 IN GOLD—THE RESULT OF TWO DAYS' SLUICING.

A FEW days before our arrival no little excitement had been created in Nome, where thrills of this kind make life endurable, by the discovery of a pocket on Nikkala gulch, where "Caribou Bill," whose name isn't Bill at all, but Thomas Dettern, one of those unscientific, unlettered, lucky chaps, had struck a pocket in his mine which produced $1,285 from twelve pans of gravel. As there are about 100 pans in a yard of gravel, this was at the rate of $10,700 to the cubic yard, and naturally produced a sensation while it lasted. This property was on the route of the day's gravel, this was at the rate of $10,700 which was just now being successfully washed out with cold water by means of a hydraulic giant. Other mines were visited on Snow gulch and Dexter creek, illustrating the different methods of handling the gravel, some by hydraulic lifts and others by simply shoveling the gravel from the bedrock in the sluice boxes.

One of the most interesting propositions, as the miners say, was the Snow Flake mine, where a shaft had been sunk to a depth of 130 feet to a bed of pay gravel. This is supposed to be a deposit similar to that found on bed rock in the gulches and along the streams, but, by a change in the face of nature, to have been covered with earth to this depth. The gravel is taken out of this underground deposit and sluiced out just as if scooped from the surface of the ground as in most other mining operations. The work of taking out the ore can be carried on all winter, but the sluicing must wait, of course, for summer weather.

An interesting fact developed here was the depth of the frost line. As has been heretofore stated, perpetual ice is found practically all over Alaska at a depth of two or three feet. That is to say, the surface thaws only about that much during the summer. The close covering of grass and moss protects the surface of the ground so thoroly from the rays of the sun that the frost is not disturbed at a greater depth. The question naturally arose, how far does the frost line go? I asked this question a number of times on the trip thru Alaska, but no one seemed to have found the limit. Here, however, I learned that the ground was frozen solidly for a depth of ninety-five feet, and a drill working in another shaft nearby afforded partial confirmation of this statement, as it was still chipping the ice at an apparent depth of sixty feet.

AN excellent lunch was served to the entire party of twenty-five or thirty at the messhouse of the Wild Goose company and we were then invited to witness a clean-up on No. 8 above, on Anvil creek, which means the eighth claim above the original discovery claim. This claim belongs to Mr. Linderberg's company, but was being worked on a lay, which is the miners' term for a percentage lease, by the Wild Goose company. The sluice box shown in the accompanying illustration had been running two days and when the riffles had been taken up and the gold in the bottom literally shoveled up, it was found that there were nearly two miner's pansfull, the value of which was nearly $8,000. And beautiful stuff it was, too. The Nome gold is brighter and prettier than that which is found in the Klondike and assays $2 or $3 more to the ounce—about $15 to $17 in the one case and $16 to $19 in the other. The greater part of it is in fine particles about the size of the grains of rock salt, or smaller, but a great many nuggets worth from $2 to $7 were found in this clean-up. I saw one piece that day said to be worth $300 and have learned that after we left there a nugget was taken from one of these Anvil creek bench claims which weighed out $3,285.90.

DID I get the fever? No, not exactly, but when you see the yellow metal gathered up by the panful and see it picked up in chunks as big as hen's eggs, you no longer wonder at the fascination which holds the prospector to his life of solitude and privation from year to year. Hope never fails; he hasn't "struck it rich" yet; but he may to-morrow. I saw, on an island off the south coast of Alaska, a typical prospector—a prospector is a miner who hasn't struck it yet. This old man was bent with age and crippled by rheumatism. He came aboard our ship to get some medicine from the ship's doctor. The doctor ministered to him the best he could but told him plainly that he had a serious infirmity and that if he didn't stop work, stop camping on the ground and take good care of himself he would soon die. The old fellow limped down the gangway to his little boat saying that he was just about to strike a rich lead and he couldn't stop now. Our pilot knew him; he had a family in San Francisco and sons able and willing to care for him, but he preferred the great game of chance to which he had given twenty years of his life already, and lived in hope. Some day he will be found dead in his cabin, and his name, unlike those of the few fortunates, but like the great majority of gold seekers, will not be read in the newspapers.

BUT not all the prospecting or all the mining of western Alaska is going on in the vicinity of Nome. Thanks to our exceedingly defective mining laws it is possible for the dog in the manger to play his part in Alaska to the limit, and he is doing it. There is nothing to prevent a single prospector from staking as much ground as he pleases, and where the indications are good he pleases to stake everything in sight. Owing to these same legal defects he may hold his claims indefinitely without doing anything to develop them, if only he is clever about it. And he is holding them in more than nine cases out of ten hoping that some one will come and buy them or till some one, thinking they have been abandoned, files on them. If they prove to be valuable he is then prepared to pounce on the one who has spent the money to prove their value and, aided by a lot of others of the manger breed, compel him to pay a large sum for a quit claim or to divide the output, or possibly to vacate altogether. The senatorial committee took stenographic reports here and at all the places visited of the recommendations of miners and business men and lawyers, and will undoubtedly endeavor to so change the mining laws as to compel those who do not develop their claims to abandon them so that others may make them productive.

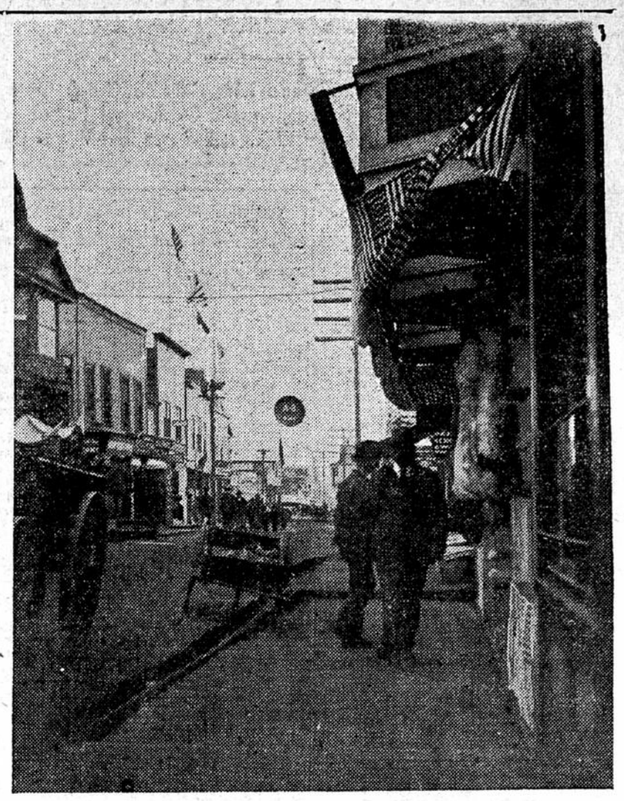
This dog-in-the-manger practice has had one partially compensating result—it has compelled the late comers to go on further into unprospected parts of the peninsula and develop the fact that there is "pay dirt" scattered pretty nearly all over the peninsula. Some of it is of too low grade to admit of profitable mining by the crude methods of the pan and the rocker, but may be made exceedingly profitable when handled by machinery on an economical scale. It is no exaggeration to say that there are thousands and thousands of acres of ground on the Seward peninsula alone which will pay rich returns when they come to be handled by improved methods. That means that large numbers of individual claims must pass into the hands of a few having capital; that the business of taking gold out of Alaska has scarcely commenced; that it will yet become a permanent industry—as permanent as coal mining in Pennsylvania, and that it will take many years to exhaust the mineral wealth of those marvelously rich and marvelously extensive gold fields.

OTHER sections of the peninsula where important gold mining operations are going on are the Council City district, seventy-five miles northeast of Nome and forty or fifty miles from the sea; the Solomon river country in the same direction, but not so far away, and along several of the streams flowing into Kotzebue sound on the north side of Seward peninsula. The Council City district is becoming the scene of very important operations. Considerable quantities of machinery have been taken into that section thru Golofnin bay and by boats up the river. A railroad will soon be in operation there, too, cheapening transportation, and thus adding greatly to the profits of mining. A railroad is also under way for the Solomon river district. This railroad construction suggests the confidence of the mine owners and the builders in the future of these districts.

While gold mining is the chief business of this section of Alaska, it is claimed that extensive deposits of coal and tin have been found in the northern part of the peninsula. How valuable they may be has not yet been fully demonstrated.

NOME is an incorporated city. The board of aldermen elect one of their number to the office of mayor, who happens, by the way, to be a former resident of Minneapolis. Mayor Rustgard was a student at the University of Minnesota nine or ten years ago. Of course there is no lack of that element which is the curse of every mining camp, but good order seems to be maintained, and perhaps is not so difficult to secure as in the frontier towns in the states from the fact that in winter, which means eight months of the year there, escape from the officers of the law is extremely difficult. The fugitive from justice who leaves Nome in winter is likely to be found in some snow bank when summer comes. There is no other place to which he can go. The federal authorities have taken a hand recently in the suppression of vice and public gambling has been completely supressed, for a time at least. Nome is up-to-date in another important particular, too; it has an aldermanic boodle prosecution in progress.

Nome has a good school building, several churches and two semiweekly newspapers that are creditable to the city—the Nugget and the Gold Digger.



FRONT STREET IN NOME.

The former, an enterprising publication, leans toward the existing municipal administration and the old federal regime still represented by Marshal Richards and United States Attorney Grigsby, formerly of South Dakota; while the latter puts up an opposition which involves its editor quite frequently in those little pugilistic affairs that impart to the life of the editor of the frontier all the strenuosity which his love for sensation craves. The city is built of wood, as are all the other towns of Alaska. No fire insurance is written here except on the warehouses of the large commercial companies. The fire service is served in summer with water from the main which brings in the city water supply by gravity from the hills, but in winter water for fighting fires is pumped from the sea. Living in Nome is much less expensive than in any other part of northern and central Alaska, because it has ocean transportation, and in summer, when Bering sea is open prices are not much higher than in Seattle.

Fort Davis, with its garrison of one company, is three miles east of Nome, on the beach, but since the early days of beach mining the soldiers have had little to do. There is also an equipment for a life-saving station for which congress, in its inability to appreciate properly any of its duties toward Alaska, has provided no crew. It would take $5,000 to $6,000 to maintain a crew for the four months when the sea is open, but that is a trifling sum compared to the importance of the work to be done. During our stay two expert oarsmen and swimmers were capsized in the surf and were rescued with great difficulty and nearly dead. Many lives are lost there every year, which might be saved if this station were manned at the light expense mentioned.

IN summer Nome gets mail on nearly every steamer from Seattle, but in winter letters, but no papers, are supposed to be brought from Dawson once a month, altho the service is uncertain. One of the severest hardships of winter residence in Nome is the fact that it takes about seventy days to get an answer by mail from any place in the central or eastern part of the United States. What this often implies in the way of anxiety and homesickness and mental depression can be imagined. Insanity is not unknown in Alaska.

It was hoped that telegraphic communication with the outside world would be established this fall, but has not yet been accomplished so far as I have learned.

Coal costs $17 a ton in Nome and $47 a ton twenty-five miles in the interior. A St. Paul man, L. F. Morgan, contemplates the manufacture of peat from the tundra for consumption in the interior and expects to produce the same results from peat for about what coal costs in Nome. The tundra, it is claimed, will make excellent peat, and if the manufacture can be made a success in the interior it will contribute materially to the development of the country. Tundra, as the word is used in Alaska, means the closely matted mass of moss and vines and roots which covers the ground to a depth of eighteen to twenty inches.

The Nome district has appeared in the gold reports for eight years. The total output up 1902 was $18,000000. The production in 1902 was approximately $5,000,000. The receipts from Nome at the Seattle mint for this year to July 27 are reported at nearly $4,000,000. Probably $2,000,000 more for the season is not an overestimate. This would raise the total output from that district, which means the Seward peninsula, to $29,000,000. The output is increasing from year to year and the increase may be expected to continue as greater development is made and more machinery is introduced. The production of gold in Alaska has only commenced, I firmly believe.

—J. S. McLain.

THE DEATH DICE

The Tatler.

The German emperor has just made a most interesting historic presentation to the Hohenzollern museum. It consists of the famous "death dice," by the help of which one of Kaiser Wilhelm's ancestors decided a difficult case about the middle of the seventeenth century. A beautiful young girl had been murdered, and suspicion fell on two soldiers, Ralph and Alfred, who were rival suitors for her hand. As both prisoners denied their guilt, and even torture failed to extract a confession from either, Prince Frederick William, the kaiser's ancestor, decided to cut the Gordian knot with the dice box. The two soldiers should throw for their lives, the loser to be executed as the murderer. The event was celebrated with great pomp and solemnity, and the prince himself assisted at this appeal to divine intervention, as it was considered by everybody, including the accused themselves.

Ralph was given the first throw, and he threw sixes, the highest possible number, and no doubt felt jubilant. The dice box was then given to Alfred, who fell on his knees and prayed aloud: "Almighty God, Thou knowest I am innocent. Protect me, I beseech Thee!" Rising to his feet, he threw the dice with such force that one of them broke in two. The unbrokenk one showed six, the broken one also showed six on the larger portion, and the bit that had been split off showed one, giving a total of thirteen, or one more than the throw of Ralph. The whole audience thrilled with astonishment, while the prince exclaimed, "God has spoken!" Ralph, regarding the miracle as a sign from heaven, confessed his guilt, and was sentenced to death. It is probable that Alfred ever after did not number himself among those who look upon thirteen as an unlucky number.

HIS SON "BILL"

New York Times.

Mr. Redfield of Philadelphia, the landscape artist, was sketching down in Jersey one summer and sold a farmer a crayon drawing in which the central figure was old Father Time with his scythe. The buyer took the picture away, well pleased, but came back with it under his arm the next day and grinned as he said:

"I've got a son Bill to home."

"Yes?"

"He hain't but 15 years old."

"U-hu."

"He's got tow hair an' a catarac' eye."

"That so."

"But he's smarter 'n gosh blamed anything I ever seen."

"That's good; I'm glad to hear it."

"Afore I had this pictur home five minutes Bill he began to roar. 'Pop,' he said, laughin' till I thought he'd bust, 'you've gone and bought a picture with old Father Time a mowin' left-handed! Now I like's not never'd have noticed it, but you can't fool Bill fer cider."

"But, my dear man," said Redfield, "did you ever see Father Time?"

"Why, no!"

"Did your son Bill ever see him?"

"Sartinly not. He's that that ain't to be saw.'

"Well, then, how do you know he isn't left-handed?"

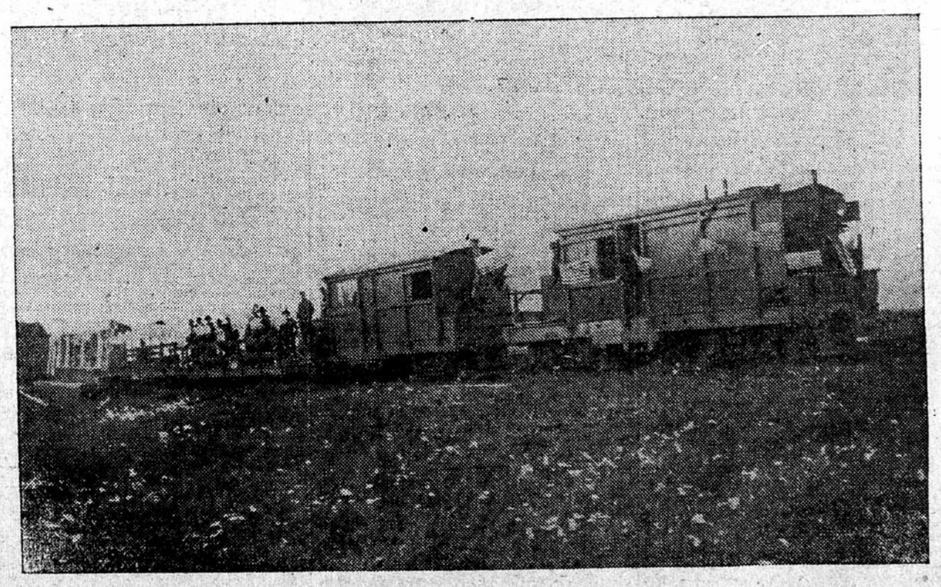
"By Gee!" gasped the farmer, "you've got the joke on us. I jest jumped at it 'thout stoppin' to think. 'N I've had two hired men that was left handed, too. Say, mister!"

"Yes?"

"I've got a son Bill."

"Yes?"

"He's smarter'n gosh blamed anything I ever seen at sizin' up a tin peddler, but he's the biggest fool in the state on picturs.'



TRAIN ON THE WILD GOOSE RAILROAD.