

A Letter From Alaska.

The following letter was received by Marion Stewart from his brother Tom, and comes to OPTIC readers directly from the wonder land.

SHEEP CAMP, Alaska, March 10th, 1898.—Dear Brother: After so long a delay of time I write a few lines to you. I have written 405 letters home. We arrived in Skagway January 24th, after being seven days on the water. It was a pleasant trip for me, though I wished to be ashore many times the last two days. I did not get sea-sick out, oh, you ought to have seen Bullock and Viles. It was great sport to see them trying to heave up their shoes soles and wishing that they were home, in h—l or any place but on the water. We took the inland passage, which is very dangerous on account of its narrow channels. It takes a cool, level-headed and an experienced pilot to guide a ship through with safety.

The first night out from Seattle we were stranded on a sand bar and had to lay for five hours, until high tide; but luckily there were no rocks and we got out all O. K. The pilot was drunk and the ship was out of her course.

We touched at Port Townsend and Fort Wrangel and Juneau. We were all night at the latter, and all went ashore and took in the town. I saw nothing worth mentioning in the curious line but two sharks and some hairy seals, and numerous porpoises. After arriving at Skagway, we went up town and got supper but stayed all night on the boat we came in on.

Next morning we went aboard a tug and came over to Dyea, and as there was no wharf there then and the tug could not land, we were put in row boats and landed on a rock heap. We scrambled along over them, skinning our shins and bruising ourselves all over, for about a half a mile and as the tide was coming in we were again put in row boats and finally landed on a man's back.

While trying to beat a man into the boat, of course I had to fall in and had it not been for a rock near by, that I caught my fingers in, I would have been like McGinty; but as it was I only got wet to the waist. But as it was cold as blazes and the wind blowing hard, I thought I would freeze before I got up town and changed clothes. All freight for Dyea is transferred at Skagway from the ships to scows or lighters and then towed over when the tide is in and anchored. When the tide goes out they are left high and dry and are then unloaded. We stayed in Dyea all night, got our outfits off the scow, had them hauled out of town a ways, and then started to move them ahead ourselves with our sleds, and we are now in camp one mile below Sheep Camp, thirteen miles from Dyea and within five miles of the summit of Chilcoat Pass. We have been unable to move ahead on account of the weather. It gets fifteen to twenty degrees below zero; and the wind from the north blowing a gale, it makes a cold that no human being can face. But there have been some fool-hardy enough to try to go over the pass in such storms and several have perished.

There was also a great deal of stealing going on along the trail, but there were three men caught some time ago. There was called a miners' meeting to try them, and while taking one from the saloon where they were being tried, he broke loose from the guard, drew a pistol that had been overlooked during the trial, and started down the road. He shot at a man that tried to catch him, the man fell down and he supposing that he had killed him, and as the mob kept closing in after him, the thief knowing that it was all over with him, sent a bullet through his own brain. So ended the career of one thief, who is looked upon even worse than a murderer is in the States. One

was held over until next day, and took out, stripped to the waist, tied to a post and given twenty lashes across the bare back. You should have heard him yell and beg for mercy; but he ought to have been hung as he was the worst one of the gang, this being his third offense. The other one was let go free.

I have been to the top of the pass three times, helping a man put in a windlass, and had a narrow escape of my life, through the breaking of a rope. The details I wrote to Al and will not repeat now, as it would take too much time and space. The actual pass is only about 1,500 feet high, but steep as the roof of a house. The packers have steps cut in the ice and snow, and a rope stretches from top to bottom to pull themselves up by. One has to be very careful. Should he lose his balance, he would be rolled to death in less than no time. They have a chute to come down in, from three to fifteen feet deep in the snow. They just all down and raise their feet. You see them at the top, then at the bottom, and that is all. They don't come fast nor fly, but just like a shot out of a gun. I was afraid the first time, but it is fun for me now.

It is a holy fright to see the people that are going to the Klendike. They estimate that there are now over 10,000 souls between Dyea and the pass, besides those that are taking other routes, and hundreds are coming in every day. Still they say that the rush is not on yet. I have seen, and can see every day that is favorable for travel, a solid mass of men with their hand sleds, and others with dog teams, and some with packs on their backs, for five miles long, joined in as close to one another as they can get. They travel in all sorts of ways. Here some pull their outfits by hand, some have dogs, some have goats, some burros, some horses, oxen and mules, and one man has an elk that draws 600 pounds. It is just any way and every way to get to the gold field and no matter how. At present they can sled with large teams to the foot of the summit. Rates are low now. You can have stuff hauled from Dyea to the foot of the summit for four cents per pound. It costs two cents from there to the top. A man can pack from fifty to 125 pounds and make from four to six trips a day. They make big money, that is, the old packers that are used to the work; but fifty pounds is a load for a novice. But after the thaw comes it will be something awful. Mud will be knee deep and everything will have to be packed, and will cost five times what it does now.

Camp life is anything but pleasant here, as the snow is five feet on the level, and you have to pitch your tent on it; but now is the the best time of the year to get through. Though the snow is deep, the roads are packed solid and sledding is good. The thaw is looked for now almost any time. As I stood on the pass the other day, I saw a sight that was beautiful to behold. As far as the eye could reach I could see nothing but high rugged peaks all white with snow, and glaciers while the sun rays reflecting from them made a sight that I could not and will not attempt to describe.

There are lots of people who are turning back from here. They get as far as the Pass, look up at it and say, "No; that is too much for me; I am going home." Others are turned back because they have not got enough provisions. The Canadians require you to have at least one year's provisions at the rate of three pounds per day, and will not let you through the line unless you have it. The duty on an outfit averages about \$30, but mine will be at least \$50, for I have good clothes and a big robe and plenty of good blankets, a rifle and lots of tab, but I am glad that I have them just the same and will not regret what I pay on them. We have our outfits at the foot of the summit and will pack them over ourselves. We have 200 pounds on top now, and it

will take us about nine days to get them all on top. Then we will move our camp over to the lakes, nine miles from the summit. Then it will take about two weeks to get moved down to camp. There we will whip saw our lumber and build our boat and wait for the ice to break up to start on our long journey of 600 miles down the Yukon river, which will not be before the 15th of May.

You can have all kinds of reports from the interior, from men that are coming out from Dawson over the ice—some good, some bad and some indifferent, but these reports are getting old to me now, and I pay no attention to anything that I hear, but will take my time, be cool and will not expose myself any more than necessary, and will be there sooner than a great many that are killing themselves to get through. But she is a dead hard game anyway that you may take it and the country has never been misrepresented in the least. There is a great deal of sickness here now. There are several cases of pneumonia, and there is another disease called the "final old spinal come and get us," or something like that, and a great many have died from it. It is caused from getting overheated and then getting chilled.

You can talk about your weather but I have seen the thermometer fall three feet in one second. I have started from camp to the summit, the sun shining bright and warm, and would be in a blinding snow storm before I got there, so bad that I could not see ten feet ahead of me. I made three attempts to get up before I made it. I was sick abed for three days and feared pneumonia. I had a high fever, and pains in my chest; but Bullock and Alfred stayed up day and night with me, and gave me medicine that we had brought along for such emergencies. They both also had a spell, but we are all well with the exception of a little backache. I am feeling as well as I ever did in my life, and think that I am equal to any emergency that I may encounter, and have all hopes of making my trip a success. Well, Marion, I guess that I have written you all there is of any interest and will now bring my letter to a close. You can write me at Dyea. I will be over on the lakes but will get my mail just the same. Write me soon as you get this so I may hear from you again before I leave the world. Direct to my full name, Thomas Riley Stewart, as there are other Thos. Stewarts here. Alfred sends his regards to you and Shank.

Your Brother,
Tom.

P. S.—I had my fortune told in Seattle. I am to be very successful and will be out in six months, and will make 203 more trips inside of the next two years. So look out for me if I do strike it.

THE OLD SPAN.

In the reign of Charles I, the Spanish empire included about 17,000,000 square miles, double that of Russia today, and greatly larger than that of any other monarchy in history. Nor was Spain great in size and strength alone. She was rich beyond computation. Besides the boundless resources of the Spanish peninsula, which the Rothschilds consider superior security for enormous loans, the wealth of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands was at the disposal of Spain.

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It is estimated that during the cen-

tury which followed the discovery of the new world 2,000 tons of gold and 6,000 tons of silver crossed the ocean to be squandered in Spain. Penniless noblemen borrowed money to pay their passage to America and returned millionaires. Common soldiers came back to the mother country with processions of slaves. A certain Spanish soldier was married in Barcelona to the daughter of a nobleman and celebrated the occasion by giving away in alms \$600,000 in gold and silver. Another returned Spaniard stood at a window in his house at Madrid and threw into the street, a handful at a time, two barrels of silver coins for the fun of seeing the rabble scramble for the money. National extravagance kept pace with individual profligacy, and legitimate business was lost sight of in speculation. Spain ruled the most of the world and scubbed the rest of it. Upon her strength was founded the national pride which has proved her national weakness.

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