

THE ORDER OF

ALASKAN MOOSE

At the top of the glacier a weird light flickered and bony fingers beckoned upward. But the candidates climb to them loomed long and cold. They were being initiated into the Order of Alaskan Moose. The order was out in full force to "put them through" and the proceedings were stimulating, although chilly.

The secret order was founded in Valdez one Alaskan night, the 21st of last December. Valdez lies on the southeastern coast of Alaska, where Prince Williams Sound slopes an ugly beach. In this most well-mannered of Alaskan towns is a famous little cabin known as "Rosey's Roost," and there the founding took place.

A dinner at the roost celebrated the inauguration of the order. F. W. Rosenthal Jr., the cabin's owner, was host, and being a one-time San Franciscan he knows the duties of host. The guests did not seem to mind that a canvas roof built upon walls of rough logs was all that lay

cult, but it is given to the true to accomplish it."

From this the moose proceeded to a calling of names and further preliminaries. The assembled forty listened in silence until Digger Jack's patience gave way.

"Gee, it's warmer for you talkin' than it is for us keepin' still," he broke in.

On the instant he was lifted off his feet, raised high in the air and his next knowledge was of being dumped in a bank of soft snow. When he looked up all was dark, save for the torches carried by two strange figures standing over him. Their fingers were fleshless, and so much of their faces as showed were the faces of skeletons. Alaskan Indians they must have been in life, for the long sweeps of Indian blankets draped their forms and

questions the candidates pressed onward up the slippery slope.

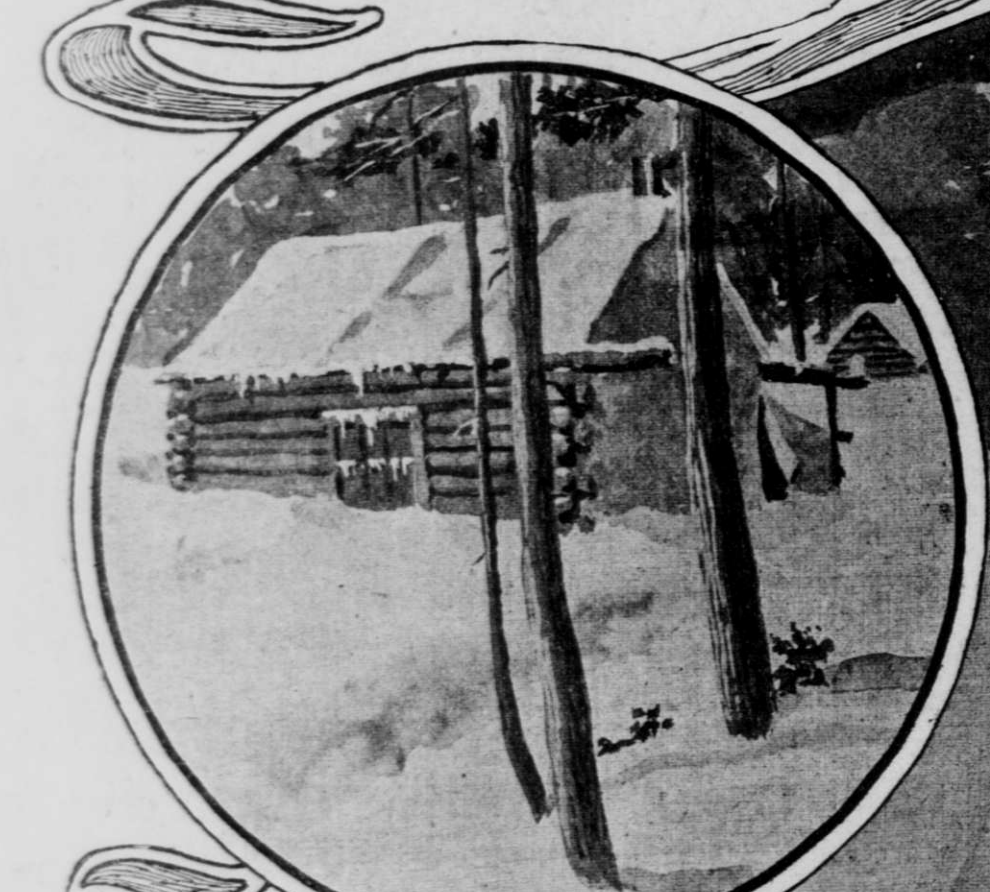
Around and about them flickered the torches and danced the dead men. Gus tried to count them, he remembers, but they were like the lambs in the field, one of which wouldn't stand still long enough to be counted. They were an industrious crowd of cadavers. When a man slipped and fell back they made for him on the instant, and he was urged forward again.

At the first bench the initiates received an "obligation," one at a time, by placing their hands upon a block of ice.

The next climb was harder. Now and

somewhere down the slope. He went like a long toboggan. One after another the men were forced to the peak and one after another slid to the bottom and landed in the snow. Out of all the forty only four returned to carry on the ascent.

Those below could be seen beginning the ascent once more. The ghouls kept to the upper party, and many were the taunts flung down to those below. The higher they went, the steeper the climb. "One slips back two steps for every one he takes forward," runs Rosey's description. But somehow they made the paradoxical climb and at the top of the glacier the



"ROSEY'S ROOST."



THE FIREPLACE IN "ROSEY'S ROOST"

between them and the falling snow. It is discreet for Valdez guests not to notice such things, for none of them can offer better. They did justice to all the northern dishes that Rosey set before them, and over the coffee and cigars they laid their plans.

As arranged that night, so everything has been carried out, and the lodge is now in good working order.

The Order of Alaskan Moose is a benevolent lodge, the members of which care for one another in sickness and attend to the burial in case of death. They care for widows and orphans as far as possible. The halls where the lodge holds meetings are upon the various "benches" of the glacier. Any tenderfoot who has been in the interior can become a member. The members are not called brothers as in most lodges, but fellow prospectors. The president is called the high spirit of the glacier, the doorkeeper is guard of the canyon and the secretary is keeper of the wa-wa, a Siwash word that means speaking.

That old year's night at "Rosey's Roost" saw the lodge organized and the charter members enrolled. But, as "Doc" Pearson asked, what is the fun of a lodge without initiations? So the members looked about for eligible prospectors, and the upshot was that they went to the ball to find them.

The ball was the most splendid that Valdez had ever seen. One extra lady had been imported from somewhere, thus making nine, counting the squaw.

Rosenthal and the other followers of the moose held a meeting after the dance was over. They called together the miners present—all but the nine who had taken the ladies home—and they explained to them the object and workings of the lodge. Rosey talked until he had to mop his forehead, for his enthusiasm waxed great, and Doctor Pearson then took the matter in his own hands and invited the miners to step up and sign as candidates.

"Think of your widows and orphans, gentlemen," thumped the doctor.

"Think of the times we'll have at social gatherings," shrilled Rosey.

"Recommended before death and after, is it?" inquired Long Tom. He was the first to sign. Thirty-nine followed him.

With forty candidates signed, the next step was to initiate them. "That's the whole fun of a lodge," explained the doctor.

It was decided that the only fair way would be to initiate the forty at once, since they had all signed at the same time. So there came a night in January when forty miners met at the bottom of the glacier.

It was a black and white night, with the snow and the sky coming together in a curving line. There was just enough light from the stars to show blank snow and ice in all directions. "Perhaps our charter members forgot this was initiation night," said Duffer Dick. "If they don't come pretty soon we'll get up a lodge of our own and initiate them."

"Hope you all like this warm place they roped us into coming to," put in Buster, with the primitive sarcasm of his kind.

"The moose maybe's got shot."

"Think we got to ride him?"

"Maybe they're feeding him extra so he can stand belin' rode by such a crowd."

And they went on so and enjoyed as other men enjoy the fluency of the word game. Then, because it was very cold, Gus Bumper stood upon the packed snow and danced a buck and wing that he had learned before he ever came hunting the gold that he had not found; and the other men patted juba in a blackly outlined circle about him, partly because their hearts were light and partly because their hands were cold. Little Mike whistled and the sound cut sharp upon the air, and a score of voices shouted and tried to fall in with the tune. In the midst of the revelry came a startled halt, for a tremendous voice from somewhere thundered "Silence!"

Everybody looked toward it. On the ice bench above stood a marvelous figure. The body was animal-like and nondescript. The head was brown fur; but the head was plainly that of a moose, with horns that branched and bristled and fiery eyes that cast a circle of light far around.

The men's silence was complete and the moose continued to speak.

"You below are gathered to become my followers. The struggle is long and diffi-

the feathers of the warrior nodded upon their heads.

Long Jack scrambled and floundered helplessly. A knee was on his chest and it was not until many apologies had been wrung from him that he stood once more on his feet and was allowed to join the party of candidates at the glacier's foot.

When he was with them once more he looked above for the moose. It was gone.

"Look where leads you on," said the dead warrior, and a bony finger pointed far above to where a figure might be seen toiling up the glacier's side.

"Onward!" shouted the warrior.

It appeared to be from out of the earth that there sprang more of the warriors, and there was a sudden sound as of dogs yelping, for the forty felt sharp prods from behind. "Onward!" echoed the other Indians, and without stopping to ask

"ABOUT THEM DANCED THE DEAD MEN"

then the moose would turn and look back toward his followers as if to beckon them on.

At the second bench they were told that they might rest. "But not until you have proved your right to rest by showing that you are the true prospectors, sure-footed and level-headed," said the leading Indian.

"Go to that rocky point and return," he commanded Swede Enoch, indicating an icy peak that jutted to the right.

"Ay tank Ay fall," remonstrated Enoch. "Then must you toil upward again."

It was at the point of several prods that Enoch was urged out to the point. "At ban slappery," he protested.

Very slippery. He put one generous foot upon the point and looked foolishly downward, and crash—

"Ay ban falling," they heard from below,

moose awaited them.

"Followers, ye are brave and true," pronounced the moose.

"S'pose we make a roast of you, now we've done it. Gee whiz, but that climb makes a fellow hungry."

The remark of the neophyte was overlooked partly because he had proved himself sterling material and partly because the charter members were growing hungry themselves.

But reaching the top was not all, as the candidates soon found. It looked cozy to see the ghouls building a fire and gathering around it. They rubbed their ghostly hands above the flames that lit up bony faces. The four candidates huddled close to the blaze and chatted comfortably of their climb, when suddenly—

The light appeared to go out. Blindness came upon them at once, for a bandage was quickly bound about each man's eyes, his hands and feet tied, and he felt himself lifted high. They waited breathlessly, expecting to come down in a snow drift, but instead—

"Roast man is good," they heard a deep voice mutter. "Be he Swede or be he English, roast man is good."

"Stewed man is better," put in another voice.

"Stewed men are better yet."

"The pot, the pot! Clap them in, cover them tight, season to taste and they'll be all right," chanted a weird chorus.

Of a sudden the men were hoisted into four several things that felt as the inside of kettles might feel. With a clank covers were clapped upon them and the pots began to swing. The crackling of flames was heard beneath, the heat increased.

"A fine stew for the hungry moose," gloated a voice.

"What's left will do for hash," added another.

"Who ever heard of stewing anything without water? They will burn," interrupted a third.

The lids were lifted and the victims felt a douse of warm water. "Take me out," squealed poor old man Coleman, when his kettle was open. "Take me out, O say, O say, O won't be stewed for no moose, O say, and begorry that's the truth O'm tellin' ye."

Poor Coleman. He had climbed the glacier at the head of the party, had climbed in dead earnest and without a laugh or a complaint. The climate and the anxiety of a hard luck life had worn on him so that of late days he had wondered to himself what was the matter with his old bones and what made that queer catch in his side. After the lodge was proposed to him and he had gone home talking to himself all the way about something or somebody that would look after "the kids and Hannah," in case they didn't have him much longer. He had taken the lodge so seriously, he had followed where the moose led so faithfully, and now—

"Take me out," he wailed. "O! won't be made hash of for no moose's breakfast."

It was long past midnight when all the candidates had reached the glacier's summit, had been "stewed" until they were deemed "done" and then laid on something that they heard spoken of as a platter, ready for serving. There followed a long ritual and the giving of passwords and grips, then a quick descent was made and supper served in the town of Valdez.

The menu was a masterpiece by Mr. Rosenthal. Valdezian oysters headed it, the oysters being the inevitable beans of the Alaskan miner, served with a mustard sauce. Mock moose soup was made of long treasured bouillon capsules brought from San Francisco, and Rosey salad with mayonnaise was built upon an onion salad, which means high living where onions sell for one dollar apiece. Roast moose with green peas and potatoes a la Rosey were genuine, and the peach mousse was a marvel, served with assorted cakes which had been bought for crackers at the store. Imported glacier water, black coffee and cigars topped off the feast, and forty new members of the Order of Alaskan Moose went home in time for breakfast.

Since that January night twenty new names have been added and the lodge bids fair to spread through Alaska. Some of the members have gone on to Circle City, taking a charter with them to start a new lodge, and from there it is expected to reach on to Dawson. Details have been carried out elaborately, even to the drawing of a coat of arms—a shield is the center and below a crossed pick and shovel and a gold scale. Two Alaskan scenes are on the shield and a moose head looms above all.

And old man Coleman is proud of the coat of arms and he has almost forgotten that he once pleaded to be taken out of the kettle.