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THE ALASKAN GOLD FIELDS.

The announcement of the return of two steamers from the Alaskan gold fields last month, with a small party of miners on board who carried about a million and a half in gold between them, has gone through the world like an electric shock and bids fair to end in a "gold fever" comparable only to the wild excitement of the California discoveries in 1849.

As compared with the California discoveries of half a century ago, those in Alaska will differ greatly in the nature of the climate under which the work of the miner must be carried out, the one being as rigorous and trying as the other was mild and favorable.

This is a fact that should be carefully considered by every inexperienced but adventurous spirit that may be contemplating a trip to this remote corner of the earth. The fact that in 1849 clerks were able to leave the desk and counter, and business men the snug comforts of home and office, and plunge without hurt to themselves into the hardships of California camp life is no proof that a similar venture may be made in these mining camps of the far North, where the thermometer has a range of one hundred and sixty degrees in the year, and sixty degrees below is a common experience in the winter.

The Klondike River, in which the rich gravel beds lie, is a minor tributary of the great Yukon River. Although the gold fields are, and probably will be, popularly known as Alaskan, they lie to the east of the boundary line and are therefore in the Canadian Northwest Territory. At present there are two routes by which the district can be reached from Seattle, the nearest American port.

As to the placer deposits themselves, they are undoubtedly of extraordinary richness. The fact that miners should come out after a few months' work with from twenty thousand to two hundred thousand in gold proves this beyond a doubt; but just what the extent of the gold field is, and how many other tributaries of the Yukon will show a similar prospect, time alone will tell.

Next to those fortunes which are made in the placer mines the most speedy and largest fortunes will be realized by the prospectors who discover the rich quartz deposits from which nature has broken out and washed down the present gravel beds. As yet nothing has been done apparently in the way of quartz prospecting, although it is likely that rich veins exist somewhere within the watershed of these various tributaries of the Yukon.

The present discoveries of gold come as a further vindication of the wisdom which dictated the purchase of Alaska from the Russian government just thirty years ago. Its purchase price was \$7,200,000, and it is estimated that the royalties from the fur sealing company, the rich returns of the salmon industry, not to mention the annual output of the great Treadwell gold mine on Douglass Island, the largest mill of its kind in the world, have together paid back the purchase price many times over to the United States.

It is gratifying to learn that there is prospect of the early completion of the tunnel under the Hudson River, which was begun in the year 1874, and upon which work was suspended in 1892, when about four-fifths of the work had been completed.

STEEL WAGON TRACKS ON COUNTRY ROADS. It is the narrow tires of heavy farm and freight wagons that do the most serious damage to country roads, especially during or after heavy rains, or when the frost is coming out of the ground in the spring.

The United States Department of Agriculture is carrying out experiments with a view to saving country roads from this quick deterioration. The device consists in laying down in the center of the road two flat steel tracks to the gage of the average farm wagon. The steel rails, for they are nothing less, are to be 1/2 inch thick and of an inverted trough shape.

As regards the value of such a road, there may be some districts where its construction and maintenance would be more economical than that of a first-class macadam, but we doubt whether it would prove to be so in cases where the materials of macadam construction are within easy reach.

PROPOSED COMPLETION OF THE HUDSON RIVER TUNNEL. It is gratifying to learn that there is prospect of the early completion of the tunnel under the Hudson River, which was begun in the year 1874, and upon which work was suspended in 1892, when about four-fifths of the work had been completed.

It was originally intended that the terminus on the New York side should be at Washington Square, but under the new scheme it is probable that it will be placed nearer Broadway. The cost of the undertaking has reached about \$4,000,000, and it is estimated that