

## MINING LIFE ON THE YUKON.

IN the *Alaskan* of recent date appeared the following account by Mr. J. E. Chapman, of the experiences of two years on the great Yukon river. It will be full of interest to those who contemplate a visit to the mines of that remote region. Says Mr. Chapman:

"The party I started out with consisted of eleven persons. We went by the Dyay pass, traveling by the same route made famous by Schwatka. The first difficulty we had to encounter was a financial one, viz: the enormous cost of packing food and necessary material to the gold diggings. The Indians for this service charge as much as the first cost of the articles. The region traveled is wild and rugged and the divide presents magnificent scenic effects in precipitous chasms and snow-clad peaks. The first stream we struck was the Salmon river, not more than two feet wide but gradually increasing in volume as it neared the great Yukon. At its junction with that river we made our first diggings. Here our little party broke up, the majority going ahead to prospect the Stewart river, another tributary of the Yukon. More than sufficient gold to pay expenses was taken out of Salmon river—in fact we never made a prospect that did not show enough to pay expenses during the time we were in the country. At every sand bar down the Salmon river we got good prospects, and these had been worked the year before by other parties. I spent my first summer working on the Salmon bars; thence I went to the mouth of the Stewart. The second summer I worked on the Stewart river. Men working at the mouth of the Stewart averaged from seven dollars to nine dollars per day. Here great trouble was experienced in trying to save fine flour gold, as it is called. If some means can be invented to save it, there are fortunes in it. I experimented three months in trying to devise means to save this flour gold, and succeeded, in a measure. When we had to shut down for the season, the diggings were paying fifty dollars per day to the man. Notwithstanding the rigorously cold winters, and the widespread reports that the season is too short to make enough to pay expenses, it lasts fully six months, and the poorest diggings struck would do more than that, and as to the climate, I would rather winter there than in south-eastern Alaska. The cold is intense, averaging forty degrees below zero during the winter months, and getting down as low as seventy and eighty degrees below zero occasionally. But when the cold is so great there is a perfectly dead calm—as calm as it is in your room—and at night the stars are so clear that they seem to hang from the sky. The absence of wind during the winter readily accounts for our not suffering much from the cold. We found plenty of game while we were there, along and in the neighborhood of the river, but it is becoming scarcer each season, and it is generally best to be independent of the resources of the country in that particular. I haven't any doubt that richer diggings are yet to be found in that region. The part of it we traveled over did not embrace more than five hundred and

fifty miles in all, including the feeders, the Salmon and Stewart rivers.

The richest diggings will undoubtedly be found along the headwaters of the Yukon. At the head of the Stewart river \$150 diggings were found by Messrs. Bozwell and Frazer. There are about seventy-five men who will winter at Fort Nelson, near the junction of the Stewart and Yukon. Quite a settlement is here established, consisting of several substantial store buildings and the houses of the miners. It is a beautiful location and evinces an eye for business and beauty on the part of the locator. Very little prospecting for quartz has been done so far; miners confining their attention principally to placers. I have heard of but one ledge on the Yukon, discovered accidentally, specimens of which assayed \$2,000 per ton. We found gold in every stream we prospected, and from other miners who have traveled over a greater extent of territory than I have, am informed that gold is found over a wider range in northern Alaska than in any state or territory on the Pacific coast. There is no doubt that we have in Alaska the largest quartz ledge that was ever found, and recent information proves that we have also the most extensive placer diggings in the world. I haven't done very well myself—have very little to show for my seasons' work, only \$1,284 after paying my expenses, but there are others who have made as high as \$6,000 in less time. I am going back next spring and with new machinery and the experience I have already gained, I expect to clean up from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The country is mountainous in the truest sense of the word, broken, jagged and rugged, with very little softness. There are stretches of flat land along the river, the result of ice and water erosion. These flats are well timbered, and as far as I could perceive, just as good as is found anywhere in south-eastern Alaska, with one additional feature that lent a glory and a beauty to the landscape in autumn, not seen anywhere except in the east, and that was the superabundance of small annuals, whose foliage became a blaze of color when the frost king began his artistic work. Of these annuals, the cotton-wood was the most abundant. In spring and early summer the number, variety and beauty of the wild flowers was bewildering. It was a perfect bouquet of color, and many of the flowers are delicately perfumed. The auroral lights were something grander than I had ever seen before. They always seemed far away, but now they came down in streams of gorgeous light right over me. I felt as if they were atmospheric glaciers, only that they rushed through space with lightning velocity and cleaved the calmer, warmer air about me, making a sizzling noise as of something burning. I think it is caused by intensely cold air, or a wedge of cold air coming in contact, or forcing its way into a warmer stratum near the earth. When I started into the Yukon country I was fortunate in meeting a party going there, and thus had company. Coming back I got a little short of provender, but managed to get through all right. There is only one very dangerous place in crossing the divide, and that is a rapid mountain stream not very deep, but very strong, which must be forded several times. We adopted the plan of holding each other's hands while we waded waist deep in the cold, icy stream, and gained the other side in safety.