

# THE GATE OF THE KLONDIKE.

BY A. A. HILL.

THE ALASKAN DISTRICT THROUGH WHICH PASS THE ONLY AVAILABLE TRAILS TO THE RICHES OF THE YUKON MINES—ITS REMARKABLE SCENERY, ITS POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE, AND THE DISPUTE AS TO ITS TREATY BOUNDARIES.

SEEN from the deck of an ocean steamer, the southeastern coast of Alaska, at the head of Lynn Canal, puts a damper upon the enthusiasm of the average gold seeker. Many a man who started from Seattle full of hope and courage has turned back without even leaving the steamer which took him up there, while still more have become infirm of purpose as soon as they struck the forbidding mountain rampart that looms up a few miles from the shore.

Among the passengers on our steamer was a man from the Pacific Coast. He was a giant in stature, in the prime of life, and a fine specimen of physical manhood. During the voyage up he had been somewhat garrulous as to the plans he intended to pursue to wrest the yellow metal from the frozen ground when he reached the gold fields of the Yukon. He had also expressed his opinion freely as to the lack of judgment shown by so many in attempting to reach a country where only the most robust could hope to be successful.

"According to all accounts," said he, as he strode the deck one day, head thrown back and chest extended, "the Klondike is no place for a tenderfoot. A man needs plenty of bone

and muscle as well as grit to get along there."

The morning of our arrival was a dismal one. The harbor is well protected by the surrounding hills, yet it was bitter cold, the wind blew a hurricane, and for more than four hours we were unable to make fast to the rude pier that runs

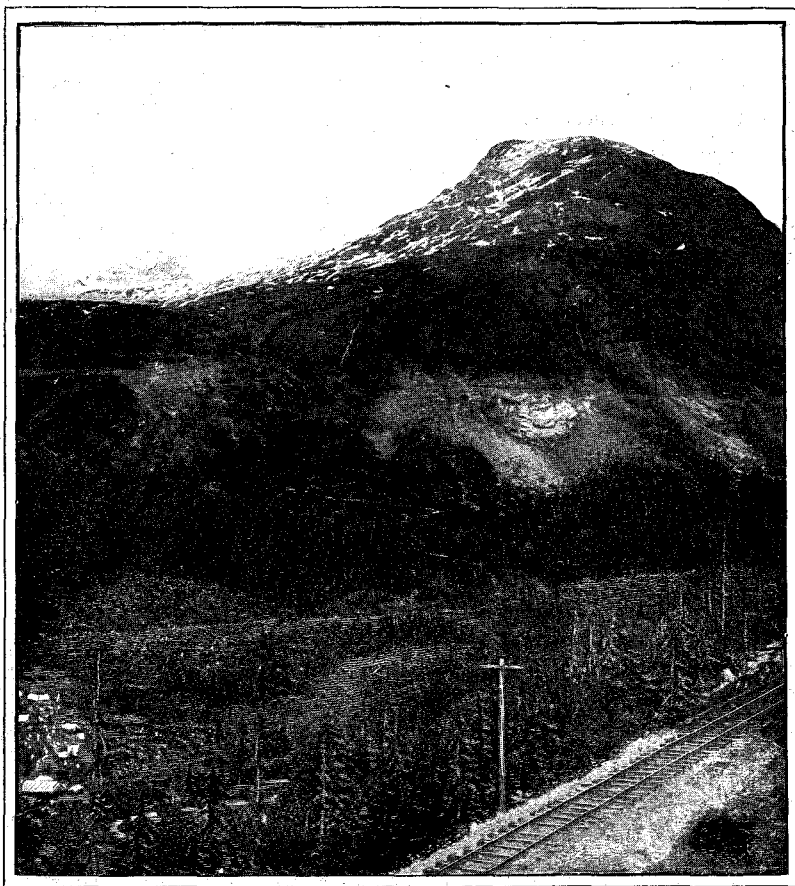


AT THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY LINE—THE UNION JACK AND THE STARS AND STRIPES AT THE WHITE PASS SUMMIT, WITH A DETACHMENT OF THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

down from the town of Skagway. In the shadows of the dawn, the scene was repellent and gloomy in the extreme. Our friend, the giant Argonaut, came out upon the deck attired in furs, so that nothing could be seen of his face save his eyes peering through the holes in his hood. He had lost his measured stride and his imposing mien.

matter of fact mind to account for its topography and climate except to assume that when the Omnipotent Architect and Builder had finished His superb work of world creation, He had a few odds and ends left—sundry mountains of assorted sizes, a collection of islands, some cata-racts and glaciers, an assortment of boulders, large and small, and fragments



SCENERY OF THE WHITE PASS ROUTE, FROM THE LINE OF THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILROAD, RECENTLY OPENED FROM SKAGWAY TO LAKE BENNETT.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

"I tell you," said he, "we had all of us better go back to civilization. This is no place for a white man."

And the man never left the steamer, but returned home with her to the States. His first glimpse of the country had dispelled his courage.

There is little wonder that the locality had not been considered of any consequence until after the gold discovery in the Klondike. There is no way for the

of weather left over from every clime. This material was deposited here because there was no other place where it would be so much out of the way.

In the treaty delimiting Alaska, mention is made of the "range of mountains which extend in a direction parallel to the coast." There is no such range of mountains. The snowy caps of towering peaks pierce the sky everywhere and as far as the eye can reach, but they are as lack-





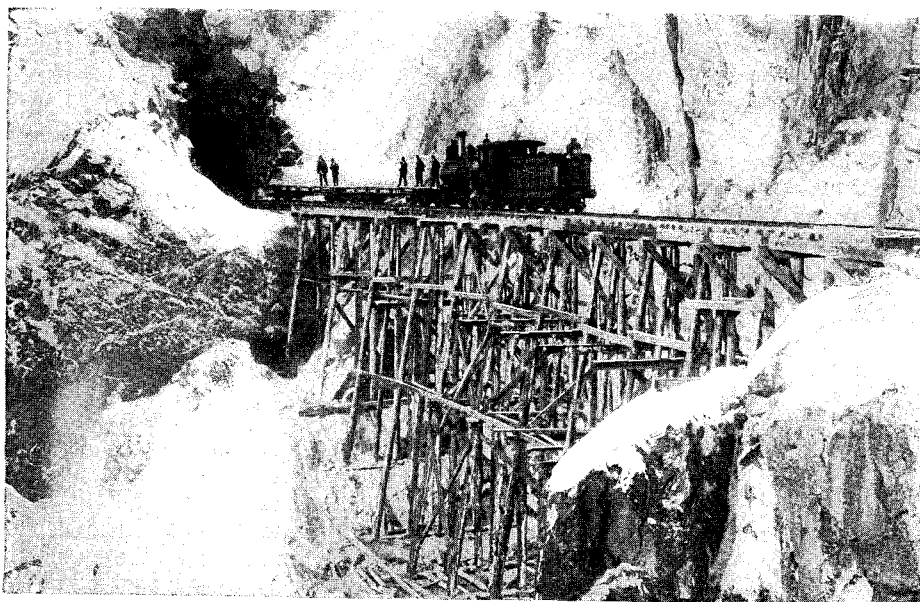
THE FIRST THROUGH PASSENGER TRAIN ON THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILROAD, AT LOG CABIN, ON THE CANADIAN SIDE OF THE PASS, JULY 6, 1899.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

ing in uniformity of direction or sequence as the billows of the sea. The climate, the topography, the soil—nature itself—seem “jangled and out of tune.” And yet it has a charm—the charm that Joaquin Miller has expressed so grandly:

The silence, the room!  
The glory of God, the gloom!

Uninviting as is the first aspect of the Lynn Canal country, it is by far the best gateway to the gold region of the interior. Less than two years ago, the Canadian government had hopes of the Edmonton route, that overland way which has since proved a long trail of hardship and death. The Stikine River trail from Fort



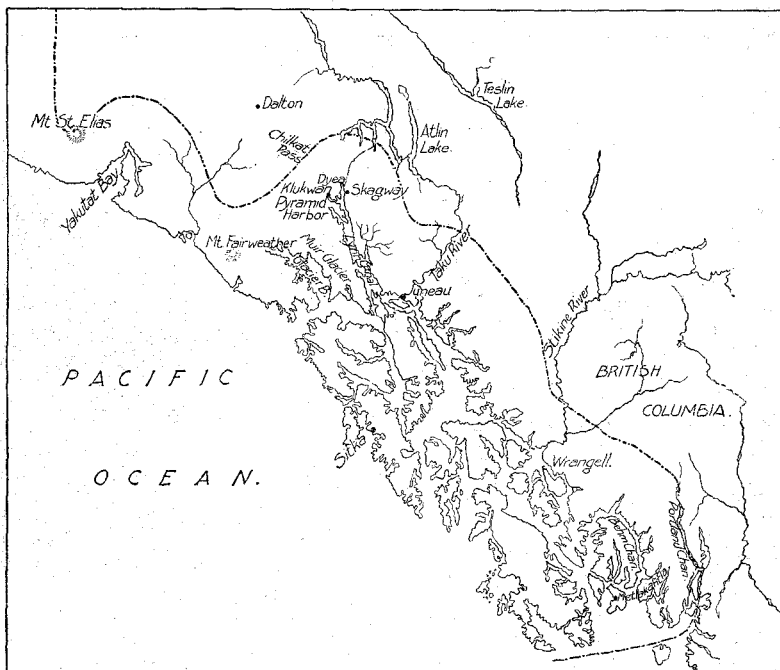
A ROUGH COUNTRY FOR RAILROAD BUILDING—TUNNEL AND VIADUCT ON THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILROAD.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

Wrangell was also urged as a good one, and this is likewise practically an all Canadian route. But it has proved a tragic failure. Then the Taku River route from Juneau had its claims, but no one is reported as having reached Dawson by taking it. Over on the American side, the Dalton trail, beginning at Pyramid Harbor and running through the Chilkat Pass—which must not be confused with the better known Chilkoot Pass—requires the fording of almost innumerable streams, besides traversing a rough and hilly country. As for reaching the gold fields by way of St. Michaels and breasting the current of

—in this way, but they had little baggage. Had they attempted to carry the outfit of the average gold seeker, it would have turned them back almost at the outset.

Even by way of Skagway or Dyea, the route to the interior is not easy except under favorable weather conditions. The lives that have been lost on these trails foot up considerably more than a hundred, while the poor dumb beasts of burden that have been sacrificed to man's ignorance and greed number thousands. But this was before the railway had been built from Skagway to Lake Bennett.



SKETCH MAP OF SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA, THROUGH WHICH THE VARIOUS TRAILS TO THE KLONDIKE PASS, WITH THE FRONTIER AS GIVEN IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT CHARTS.

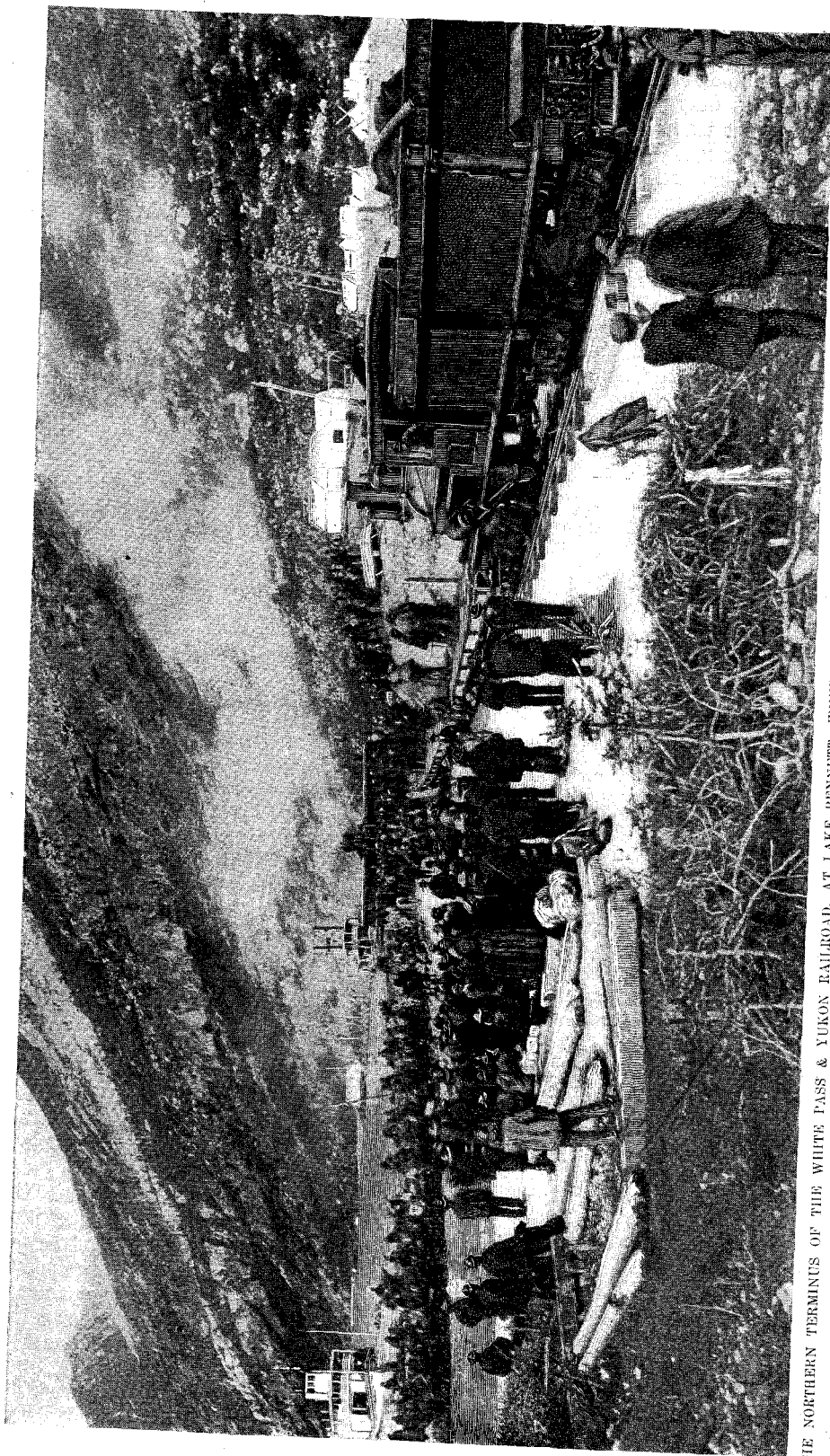
the shallow Yukon, with its continually shifting channel, it can be done only in midsummer and at great expense of time and money, although coming out of the country by this route, traveling with the current, is far easier.

There has also been some talk of getting into the interior by way of Copper River, and this seems easy enough, on the map, but the experience is as withering as Dead Sea fruit. True, two out of a party of twelve government officials are reported to have reached the Tanana River—which flows down to the Yukon

Hereafter probably four fifths of the gold seekers will begin their long journey inland at this point.

With the uncertainty as to the best route to reach the Klondike, it is little wonder that, previous to 1898, the Canadian government established its military post of mounted police and its custom house near the head of Lake Bennett, some forty miles from the coast, but early in the season of that year their headquarters were moved shoreward to the summit of White Pass and the top of Chilkoot Pass. There may have been





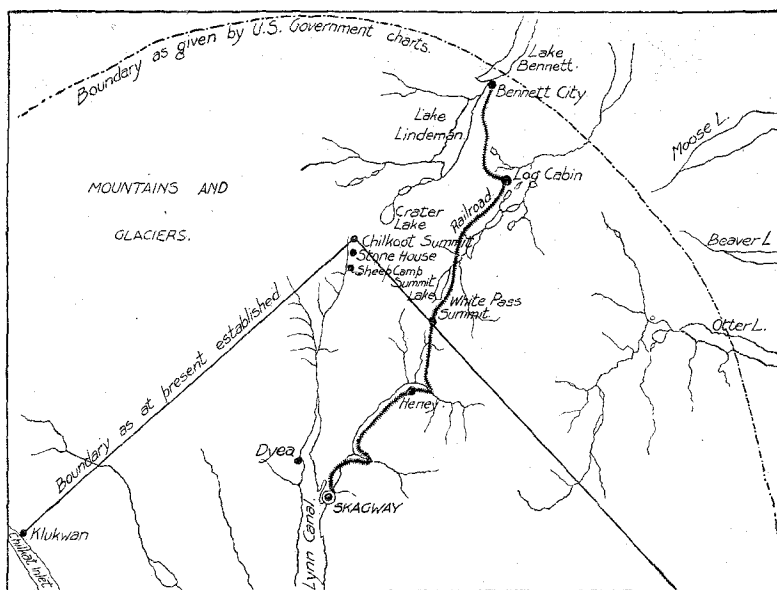
THE NORTHERN TERMINUS OF THE WHITE PASS & YUKON ROUTE, AT LAKE BENNETT, WHERE GOLD SEEKERS CAN TAKE A STEAMER FOR THE KLONDIKE VIA WHITE HORSE RAPIDS AND FORT SELKIRK.

*From a photograph by Higgs, Skagway*

more than one reason for this. Here it was impossible for travelers to evade the payment of duty by making a detour and striking the trail further inland, for these narrow gorges at the summit are the only possible trails through which the country can be reached. At Lake Bennett, on the other hand, the trail is not so well defined, and the gold seeker can and perhaps did get past the officials without their knowledge. Moreover, the move was locally regarded by Americans as a step towards the assertion of Canada's claim to the possession of Dyea and Skagway, the two important points on the coast toward which most of

national boundary as shown in the map on this page.

The actual value of the land in dispute, of course, is insignificant compared to the importance of the seaport privileges that Canada would secure by such an accession. It would also give Great Britain an open seacoast for her great northwest territories, and weaken the United States by taking away its exclusive jurisdiction north of the fifty fourth degree of latitude. Through this gateway an immense amount of supplies as well as immigration for the Canadian Northwest Territory now goes through American hands.

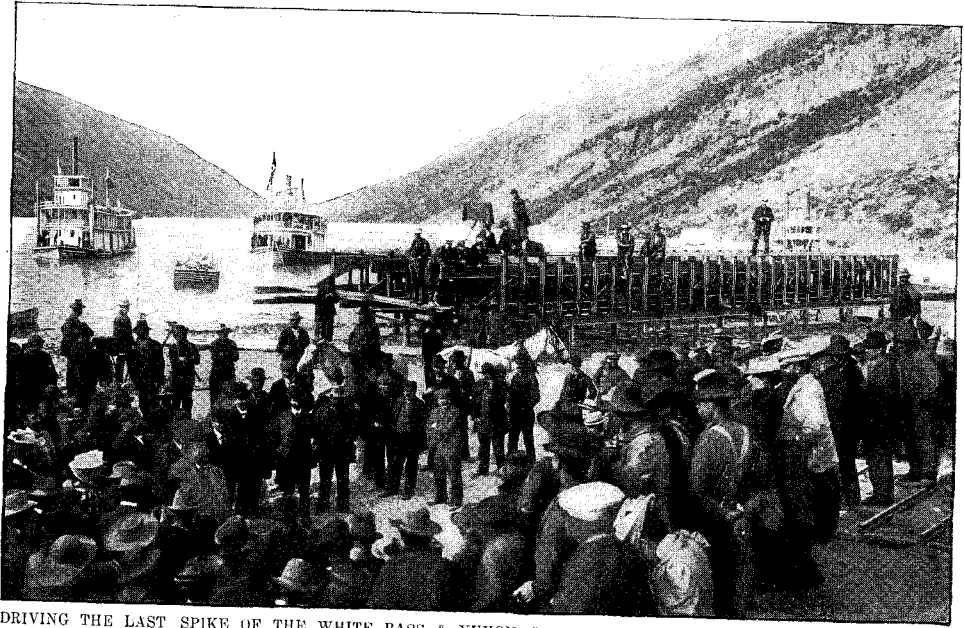


SKETCH MAP OF THE LYNN CANAL DISTRICT, SHOWING THE BOUNDARY AS CLAIMED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, AND AS NOW ESTABLISHED BY THE MODUS VIVENDI.

the travel was trending; the claim being based on the fact that though actually lying beside deep salt water, the settlements in question are more than ten marine leagues (the distance named in the old Russian treaty) back from the ocean coast line, neglecting the narrow fiords that cut this region into a maze of islands and peninsulas. To Americans, the Canadian position seems an untenable one, but the question cannot be discussed here, and may safely be left to governmental diplomacy for a settlement—an early one, we hope; an amicable one, we cannot doubt. Meanwhile, a “modus vivendi” has been agreed upon, provisionally delimiting the inter-

Canadian officials have stated that the income of the government from the ten per cent royalty on the gold output, from licenses and the customs receipts, does not balance the outlay necessary for maintaining the various posts of the mounted police and other expenses incidental to preserving order. American miners are incredulous at the statement. They know that less than two hundred men preserved order, protected property, collected duties, issued licenses, and settled disputed mining questions throughout the entire Yukon District during the tremendous rush of sixty thousand men in 1898, at a time when the police had





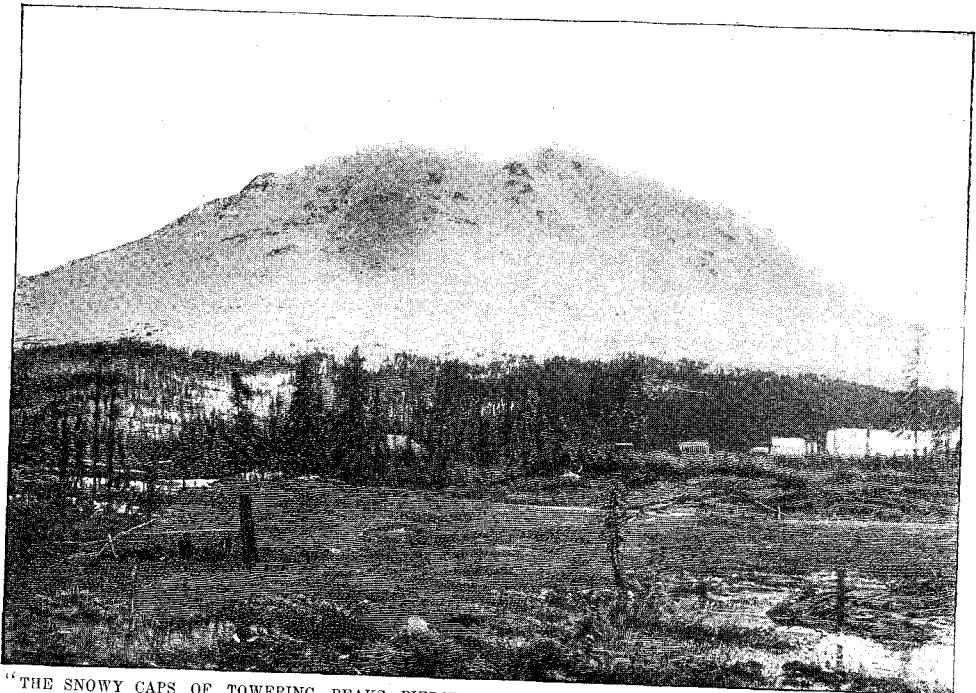
DRIVING THE LAST SPIKE OF THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILROAD, AT LAKE BENNETT, JULY 6, 1899.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

to contend against every sort and condition of humanity.

Whatever the American may have to say about the Canadian government in the abstract, he has only praise for the

individual member of the mounted police. The red coated officers are almost invariably courteous, quiet, well educated, and well bred, and the stranger in the country wonders what quality in their



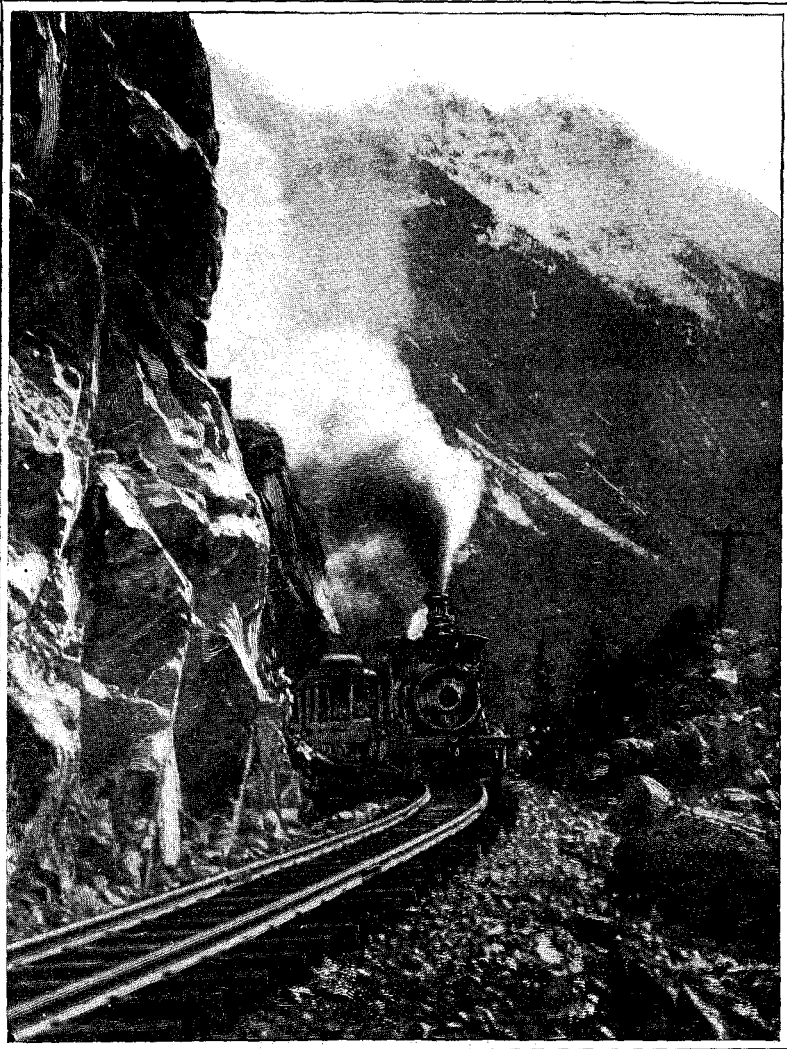
"THE SNOWY CAPS OF TOWERING PEAKS PIERCE THE SKY EVERYWHERE"—MOUNT HALCON, ON THE CANADIAN SIDE OF THE WHITE PASS.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

makeup it is that inspires respect bordering on fear in white man and Indian alike. Two of these men are a match for ten times their number simply because the outlaw knows that in opposing their authority he is waging war on the British government itself. The United States

country will be practically worthless, unless coal and cheap transportation are supplied in order that the comparatively poor claims can be worked with profit.

The Canadian government has pre-empted all veins of coal that have been or may be discovered, rightly concluding



A PASSENGER TRAIN ROUNDING ROCKY POINT, ON THE WHITE PASS & YUKON RAILROAD.

*From a photograph by Hegg, Skagway.*

would require more men, and a much larger outlay, to do the same work.

Cool headed mining experts who look at Alaska and the Yukon District in a dispassionate way, agree that it is the greatest mineral country in the world, but claim that when the placers of the few rich creeks are worked out, the

that this mineral is a most valuable product in a country where there is little wood for fuel to thaw the frozen ground—practically the only method of mining.

The railway from Skagway to Lake Bennett has so reduced freight rates that today the miners in Dawson can order supplies direct from the States at a cost



of from five to seven cents a pound, or about one half what was formerly charged from Skagway to the summit of White Pass. This road has been surveyed as far as Fort Selkirk, but there is little reason why it should be extended beyond its present limit. With the expenditure of a few hundred dollars in improving the channel at Miles Canyon, and at Squaw, White Horse, and Five Finger Rapids, light draft boats will take freight and passengers down through the lakes and rivers to Dawson easily, safely, and speedily.

No one can know better than the Canadian officials the rich possibilities of this rugged country when properly developed. If she should obtain a seaport, Canada will hold the key not only to her own vast mineral country, but to Alaska as well.

She is willing to wait for time and toil to reveal this hidden wealth. If the rich veins of pure copper reported by capable prospectors in the Copper River district are ever worked, the ore will probably have to be taken out some other way, but the great bulk of the Alaskan business will be transacted by way of Skagway.

So this little ambitious city, with its push and enterprise, its fairly good harbor, and its accessibility from other ports, is of more importance to the United States and to Canada than hundreds of square miles of mineral territory yet unexplored and unknown. The day is not remote, but nigh, when Skagway will be the metropolis of Alaska, and the strange country that surrounds her, crowded as it is with wonders of scenery and of nature, will pulse and throb with human activity.

#### THE MIDNIGHT MINUET.

It is dark and dull and gloomy, with its windows facing north,  
This the old colonial mansion from its ivy peering forth.  
There's a flintlock o'er the mantel, and a flag above the door,  
And a harp with strings that dangle in the dust upon the floor.  
But when falls the purple twilight, then the silver sconces flare,  
Comes a hand upon the knocker, and a step upon the stair,  
And she courtesies from the threshold in her sweet, patrician grace,  
As he grounds his moldy musket by the fireless chimney place.

Here and there the yellow laces from her sleeves have dropped away,  
And her pearls have lost their luster in the darkness and decay;  
Brown and scentless are the roses that are clustered on her breast.  
But her gown is gold embroidered, and her hair with powder dressed.  
He is clad in tattered garments that were once of buff and blue,  
On his temples is a bandage where the blood is oozing through;  
Sash and plume are grimed with battle, spur and saber red with rust—  
But the harp is faintly sounding from its covering of dust.

It is played by unseen fingers that with touches soft and slow  
Gently wake the mournful music of a century ago;  
Quaint old tunes that were in fashion in the days of patch and puff,  
Periwigs and ostrich feathers, lace cravats and perfumed snuff;  
And they walk with prim precision through the stately minuets,  
Though her faded satin slippers with the grave dews glisten wet,  
And he moves a little stiffly, since beneath the flower and vine  
He has slept a hundred summers on the field of Brandywine.

Hark! The ancient clock is striking in the dim deserted hall,  
Slowly, as with age grown weary, twelve deliberate strokes in all,  
And the tinkling harp is silent, and the lady lifts her train,  
And the soldier takes the musket to his shoulder once again;  
Dies the candle in the socket, loudly creaks the crumbling stair,  
Swings the door on broken hinges with a rush of chilly air.  
But the mouse behind the curtain and the spider in her net  
Still remain to tell the story of the midnight minuets.

*Minna Irving.*