GOLD HUNTING IN ALASKA

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AS TOLD BY

JOSEPH GRINNELL

EDITED BY ELIZABETH GRINNELL

Author of "How John and I Brought Up the Child," "John and I and the Church," "Our Feathered Friends," "For the Sake of a Name," etc.

Dedicated to disappointed gold-hunters the world over

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ALASKA.

The New World brings her daughter out
With fuss and bluster now;
Adorers seek her snow-white hand,
And at her beauty bow.
Each strives her favor first to gain,
And rudely steps upon her train.

They court her while they call her "cold"
And "distant" to her face;
The heiress smiles, while quick breaths lift
Her frills of ancient lace—
The eyes of all her suitors rest
On glint of gold upon her breast. —E. G.

GOLD HUNTING IN ALASKA.

PREFACE.

The following story was originally written in pencil on any sort of paper at hand, and intended merely for "the folks at home." It is only by a prior claim to the manuscript that the young gold-hunter's mother has obtained his consent to publish it. The diary has been changed but little, nor has much been added to make it as it stands. The narrative is true from beginning to end, including the proper names of persons and vessels and mining companies. It is offered to the David C. Cook Publishing Company with no further apologies for its sometimes boyish style of construction. It will give the reader, be he man or boy, a hint as to how a young fellow may spend his time in the long Arctic winter, or in the whole year, even though he be a disappointed gold-hunter. It may afford suggestion to mining companies continually going to Alaska as to their responsibility to each other and to the natives of the "frozen North." It may give "the folks at home" some intimation as to possible "good times" under trying circumstances. Blue fingers may not necessarily denote a blue heart.

ELIZABETH GRINNELL.

Pasadena, Cal., Jan. 15, 1901.

CHAPTER I.

WE ARE a company of twenty men bound for Kotzebue Sound, Alaska. It is needless to say we are gold-hunters. In this year of our Lord 1898, men are flying northward like geese in the springtime. That not more than one of us has ever set eyes on a real, live nugget passes for nothing; we shall naturally recognize "the yellow" when we see it. It is our intention to ransack Mother Nature's storehouses, provided we can unlock or pry open the doors without losing our fingers by freezing.

Why we have selected Kotzebue Sound as the field of our maneuvers it would be difficult to give a rational reason. It may be nothing more nor less than the universal rush to the gold fields of Alaska, which rush, being infectious, attacks all grades and conditions of men. That all grades and conditions are represented in our company will be demonstrated later on, I believe.

The instigator of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining and Trading Company is an undertaker by trade, a sometime preacher by profession and practice when not otherwise engaged. His character is not at all in keeping with his trade; he is a rollicking fellow and given to much mirth.

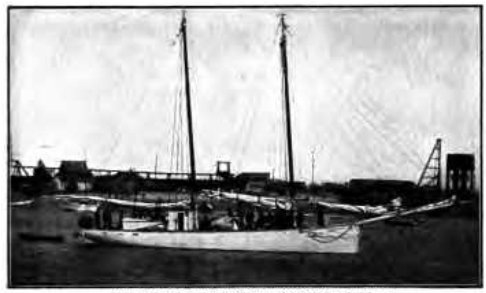
We have also a doctor, as protection against contingencies. His name is Coffin. He and the undertaker have been bosom friends for years. The combined influences of these are sufficient to insure proper termination to our trip, if not a propitious journey. The eldest of our company is rising fifty, the youngest twenty-one. The oldest has lived long enough to be convinced that gold is the key that unlocks all earthly treasures; his sole object is the key hidden somewhere in the pockets of the great Arctic. The youngest cares little for the gold, being more concerned about certain rare birds which may cross his devious path. The most of us have never met before, but are now an incorporated mining company, like hundreds of ship's crews this year. Each intends to do his share of work and to claim his portion of the profits, if profits come.

We have a two years' outfit of every comfort possible to store away on a little schooner seventy-two by eighteen feet. Her name is "Penelope;" you can read it in plain type half a mile away. She was built for Japan waters and has never set keel in Arctic seas. There are numerous prophecies concerning her: "She will never reach her destination;" "Impossible that she is built for a stormy coast;" "You may as well make your wills before you embark." And many other cheering benedictions are tossed to the deck by friends on shore who watch us loading the freight into her hold.

We make no retort. Of what would be the use? Our hearts, our hopes, ourselves, are

on board of her for better or for worse. We wave our handkerchiefs in a last "good-by." They are the only white handkerchiefs in our possession, brought and shaken out to the winds for this very purpose. From henceforth the bandana reigns on occasions when any is required. Old Glory floats above us; the "Penelope" is bright with new paint and trimmings and masts; she is towed out of San Pedro Harbor, and heads for San Francisco for more supplies.

Out of San Pedro Harbor! The very same of which R. H. Dana wrote in 1840 as a "most desolate looking place," frequented by coyotes and Indians, but "altogether the best harbor on all the coast."



"Penelope" at Anchor in San Pedro Harbor.

We have a copy of his "Two Years Before the Mast" on board, and shall be complimented by what he says about the Englishmen and Americans whom he met. "If the California fever (laziness) spares the first generation, it always attacks the second." Did Dana mean the crew of the "Penelope"? We shall see.

Having made a dutiful promise to my mother to "keep a faithful diary" of our cruise, which, in event of disaster, shall be duly corked in a large bottle and sent adrift, I now enter my first date since April 8, 1898, the day on which we set sail from San Pedro, California.

North Pacific Ocean, June 5.—We are seventeen days out from San Francisco, and *have made* a little over twelve hundred miles; that is, in a direct line on our course to Unamak Pass through the Aleutian Islands, for we have had many unfavorable winds against which we were compelled to tack. We have sailed two thousand miles, counting full distance. We have experienced two storms which, put together, as the captain says, makes "a good half a gale." While the "Penelope" rides the highest billows like a duck, at times she pitches and rolls in a terrific fashion. Her movements are short and jerky, unlike those of a steamer or larger vessel. When the wind blows hard on her quarter, the rail is often under water. This makes locomotion difficult, especially if the waves are rolling high, and everything is bouncing about on deck. It is my duty to carry "grub" from the galley to the cabins, and I can never handle more than one thing at a time, as I am obliged to keep one hand free. I wait for my opportunity, else a heavy sea starts at the same time and we go down together, "grub" and all. However, I have had few accidents. Once I landed a big platter of mush upside down on the deck, and at another time a gust of wind took all the biscuits overboard, while a big sea filled the milk pitcher with salt water. This was not so bad as Dana's experience with the "scouse," which "precious stuff" came down all over him at the bottom of the hatchway. "Whatever your feelings may be, you must make a joke of everything at sea," he wrote just after he had found himself lying at full length on the slippery deck with his tea-pot empty and sliding to the far side. We are better off than the crew of the "Pilgrim" in 1840, for there is plenty more, if half the breakfast goes to feed the fishes.

Down in the cabin there is the most fun. The table is bordered by a deep rail, and several slats are fastened crosswise over the surface to hold the dishes, besides holes and racks for cups; yet when things are inclined at an angle of thirty-five degrees it is almost impossible, without somebody's hand on

each separate dish, to keep the meal in sight. We have some trouble in cooking at times, but the stove has an iron frame with cross pieces on top to keep the kettles from sliding, which, in rough weather, can never be filled more than half. We usually get up very good meals; that is, for such of the crew as have an appetite. For breakfast, rolled oats mush, baking-powder biscuit, boiled eggs or potatoes, and ham. For dinner, light bread or milk toast, beans or canned corn, salt-horse, creamed potatoes, and often soup with crackers. For supper, canned fruit, muffins or corn bread, boiled ham and baked potatoes. Of course tea or coffee with each meal. The cook makes fine yeast bread, ten loaves a day. There are twenty-three men on board, including the hired sailors who are not of the company, and even with five in the hospital we make way with a good deal of food.

Our fare differs somewhat from that of the crew of the "Pilgrim," whose regular diet, Dana wrote, was "salt beef and biscuit," with "an occasional potato." But it must be remembered that we had several articles, such as eggs and ham and fresh potatoes, the first days of our cruise, which we never saw later on when we were confined to bacon and beans for staple supplies, with dessicated vegetables and some canned goods for extras.

We left San Francisco May 19, after taking on board the parts of a river boat, to be put together when needed, and much more Arctic clothing than we can possibly use in two or even four years. The sea was very rough. Our captain had not been on board ship for two years, and the result was that he, with every one of the party except the sailors, was very sea-sick. The doctor was pretty well in a couple of days, but the undertaker fared not so well. He stayed on deck and sang and jumped about and did his best to keep jolly as long as nature could hold out. Presently one could tell that he was feeling rather uneasy about something, when all of a sudden quietness reigned and only an ominous sound from over the rail gave indication of what was passing.

We have some fine singing. "The "Penelope Quartette" has been formed and practices every evening, making voluminous noise, but there is no fear of disturbing adjoining meetings or concerts. The quartette is composed of Reynolds (the undertaker), Foote, Wilson and Miller. There are other singers of less renown. We have a "yell," which is frequently to be heard, especially at getting-up time in the morning. It is "Penelope, Penelope, zip, boom, ah! Going up to Kotzebue! rah! rah! rah!"

We are very much crowded and have many discomforts, as anyone can imagine we should have in so close quarters; but we are a congenial crowd. I was sea-sick for a week, but am all right now and capable of eating more than anyone else, a symptom which the doctor fears may continue, as I make it a rule to eat up all there is left at both tables. There are eleven men in the after cabin and twelve in the forward cabin, including the forecastle, and each set have meals served in their respective cabins. Having been chosen as "cook's assistant," I have ample opportunities.

We have seen but few things of interest outside the boat, and that makes us more interesting to one another. We have sighted no vessels for two weeks. I saw two fur seals. They stuck their heads above the water just behind us, eying us curiously for a few minutes, and then vanished. We have seen one shark, but no whales. Petrels, or Mother Cary's Chickens, are almost always to be seen flitting over the waves. Black-footed albatrosses, or "goonies," as the sailors call them, are common, following the boat and eating all kinds of scraps thrown to them. We caught two with a fish-hook, but let them go, as there is now no suitable place to put the skins. One of the albatrosses measured seven feet three inches from tip to tip of the outstretched wings. We fastened upon his back a piece of canvas, giving the "Penelope," with the date and longitude and latitude. I wonder if he will ever be seen again, and, if seen, if this will be the only news of us the world will ever receive!

There are several "goonies" which seem to follow us constantly. We have named them Jim, Tom and Hannah. They know when meal time arrives, and then come close alongside within a few feet.

Tuesday, June 7.—The past two days have been stormy, but we have made good time and are only four hundred and sixty-seven miles from Unamak Pass. We saw several pieces of kelp this morning, which gives evidence of land not far off. This morning the sun came out several times, and every one is feeling quite jolly, which makes even the sea-sick ones better. One of the most popular songs on deck these cloudy days has been the familiar one. "Let a little sunshine in." Everyone was singing it to-day, when

Cooks' Union.

suddenly the clouds broke as if by impulse and the warm sunshine flooded the damp decks.

The sun doesn't set now till nearly nine o'clock, and the whole night long it is scarcely dark at all.

To-day Clyde took the pictures of the party in groups, or "unions." There is the "Sailors' Union" (six of the boys besides the regular sailors, who go to the watch along with them and take their tricks at the wheel), the "Dishwashers' Union," the "Doctors' Union" (Dr. Coffin and Jerr, who is a druggist), the "Cooks' Union" (Shafer and myself), and the "Cripe' Union" (the cripples, or those who are sea-sick, and do no work; they are Fancher, Wyse, McCollough, Wilson, Reynolds and Shaul). If the winds are favorable we expect to rest in Dutch Harbor for a few days, as we are no doubt too early to get into Kotzebue. From all accounts we cannot hope to reach the Sound until July 14.

Sailors' Union.

This sort of experience is so new to me, I thought I knew something of life on a schooner, during the trip to San Clemente and San Nicholas last year, but this is more and better. Nearly everyone save myself is longing for land, and they watch our course each day as it is traced on the chart with more interest than anything else. Just now I am sitting alone on a bench in the little galley, watching the potatoes and salt-horse boiling. The sun has come out and everyone is on deck, the "cripe" lying against the stern rail or along the side of the cabin. By orders of the doctor all the bedding is airing on the deck and rails amidships, and some of the boys are taking advantage of the fair weather to do their washing. I did my own yesterday, although it was raining, and, as I have a "pull" with the cook, I dried the clothes in the galley at night. Of course all washing has to be done in salt water and it is scarcely satisfactory, to say the least. This necessary laundry work of ours is destined to occupy a good deal of our time and patience, and I suspect that before our cruise is over we shall long for a glimpse of a good, faithful washerwoman with her suds, and her arms akimbo, and her open smile.

June 12.—We are in Bering Sea and all's well. It is partly clear, but cold, with a sharp wind. We went through Unamak Pass in the night. The captain thought it dangerous as well as delaying, to stop at Dutch Harbor, so we gave it up with disappointment. After beating for several hours, we are now well on our way straight northward to St. Lawrence Island. There is no ice in sight, but we can smell it distinctly. As we went through the Pass it was raining, and we could see but indistinctly the precipitous shores. The Pass is not usually taken by sailing vessels, as it is quite narrow, but our captain brought us through all right in spite of fog and storm. He has not slept for forty-eight hours. The shortest time ever made by a sailing vessel from San Francisco to Unamak Pass, 2,100 miles, was eighteen days; and we made it with the "Penelope" in twenty-three days. Hurrah for the "Penelope"!

Dishwashers' Union.

This morning we passed within hailing distance of the ship "Sintram," of San Francisco. She had taken a cargo to St. Michaels and was on her way back. Her captain promised to report us, and he also told us that the ice was yet packed north of St. Michaels and that several ships were waiting. Clyde took a snap shot of the "Sintram."

There are plenty of birds to be seen now. If I had faith enough to warrant my walking on the water I would go shooting. Our small boats are all lashed

Cripe' Union.

to the deck of the "Penelope," but the captain says that in a few days we can put a skiff overboard if it is calm, and then ho! for murre pot-pie! Everyone is hungry for

A Sunbath on Deck.

fresh meat. We try fishing with no luck. Saw a fur seal to-day, the first in two weeks.

June 19, Bering Sea, latitude 63 degrees, longitude 172 degrees, 38 minutes.—For the past few days we made good time, one hundred miles to the day, but on this date we are becalmed. Clyde has gone out in the boat to catch a snap shot of us. He need not hurry, for never was mouse more still than the "Penelope" at this moment. The thermometer registers 38 degrees on deck. We have sighted no ice yet, and hope the Bering Straits are open.

I am sitting in the galley, as my fingers get too cold to write outside. We have just cleared off supper, and the boys are pacing the deck for exercise. Some of them are below, where an oil stove in each cabin takes the chill and dampness from the air. It is seldom that the galley is not crammed full, but just now the cook and the others have gone below for a game of whist, so I embrace the opportunity to write. My diary is always written after I have finished my daily bird notes, which I make as copious as possible. I have some good records already. We were becalmed three days in sight of the Pribiloff Islands, and at one time were so close to St. Paul Island that we could hear the barking of thousands of seals, and, by the aid of a field glass, could see them on the beaches. A few were seen about the "Penelope," and one came so near to the boat that it was touched with an oar. We unlashed the smallest boat and rowed out with her during the calmest days, so we had some much-needed exercise. Frequent fogs kept us near the "Penelope's" side, as we should easily become lost. We saw no ducks or geese, but we had murres in plenty and pot-pie for several days. For a change they were served up in roasts, being first boiled, and were finer than any duck I have tasted, though some of the squeamish crew composing the "Crips' Union" declared they were "fishy."

Of course I improve every opportunity during pleasant days to collect, and the result is thirteen first-class bird skins. These sea birds are almost all fat and the grease clings to and grows into the skin so firmly that it is almost impossible to put them up. Among the good things which I have secured are the crested auklet, red phalarope, pallas, murre and horned puffin, but it will be difficult to preserve the skins in this damp climate. Dr. Coffin is becoming interested already, and talks of putting in his spare time collecting with me. He has been taking lessons in skinning, and so far has put up two specimens. We have rigged up a cracker-box for our bird-skins and try to keep it in the dryest place, though it is so

Speaking the "Sintram."

crowded on shipboard that a convenient place for any particular thing is scarce.

The currents in Bering Sea are quite strong, tending northward toward the straits, so that even when the wind fails