

BESIEGED BY SIOUX.

The Thrilling Experience of Some Black Hill Miners During the Gold Fever

"In the summer of '76, when the Black Hills excitement first began in real earnest," said Mr. Coats, a reporter of the Chicago Times, "I was the owner of a fine farm in northwestern Nebraska and in addition was doing a good business as a surveyor. One of my neighbors, named Bell, was an old California miner. He at once became infatuated with the idea of going to the new El Dorado, and I, too, soon caught the fever. Against the advice of my wife and friends, and even against my own better judgment, I determined to seek a fortune in the hills. Hastily arranging my affairs I set out, accompanied by Bell. We made our way by steamboat to Fort Pierre, where we joined a heavily armed company of forty gold hunters.

"The journey to the foothills was without incident, although the country was alive with murderous Sioux. We reached a camp on Spring Creek in the southern hills the 20th of July, where we found fifty others already ahead of us. The first comers had staked out claims and built a very strong fortress upon a rocky knoll. They were so harassed by the Indians that they scarcely dared venture outside their fort. Being reinforced by our company they felt able to defy the redskins and determined to begin active mining operations. Yet so pressing was the danger that the entire company was divided into four equal parts which were to alternate work about in the various labors. The first division was to hunt at a safe distance from the fort. This was an important duty, for our only provisions were the game brought in by the hunters. Only a small supply of food had been brought from civilization, and of course there were no means of getting more.

"The second division did garrison duty at the fort; the remaining half of the party worked the mines; that is, one-half of the squad acted as sentinels while the others pried pick and shovel. It was very slow, very hard work. In the hills all the places mines are in dry gulches instead of beside the streams, as in California. All the "pay-dirt" had to be wheeled a quarter of a mile to get to water. Our best exertions only yielded \$4 or \$5 per man per day. Divide this amount with the three others who were guarding or hunting for the miner and you can see that no one had much prospect of getting rich.

"Bell and I were thoroughly disgusted in less than a week. We had come to make money and not to toil and strive for a pittance that a section-hand would scorn. Wonderful stories were told of the richness of the mines on French creek, twelve miles south. There we determined to go, though we were told it would be equivalent to walking into our graves. In all that company of fearless pioneers not one would entertain the idea of accompanying us for a moment.

"Nothing would daunt us, however, and waiting for a dark night, so as to escape observation by prowling Indians, we placed the scantiest of outfits on a mule and set out, after having secured careful directions from an old scout who was thoroughly acquainted with the country.

"We reached French creek safely at day-break, after an exhausting march in the darkness and over the fearfully rough hills. After a scanty breakfast, we moved up the creek a short distance and came to a place Bell said had a good appearance. I mounted guard while Bell sank a prospect hole. He found bed rock at a depth of two feet. Soraping up a panful of dirt he took it to the creek, and to our infinite delight it yielded at least \$5 in very coarse gold. You can judge the value of our find when I tell you that dirt that will yield 5 cents to the pan, under ordinary circumstances, is worth working. Throwing prudence to the winds we both began to dig and wash, never stopping until dark. We were utterly exhausted by that time and were glad to roll ourselves in our blankets and go to sleep without a morsel of supper.

"Next morning while Bell hurried out to shoot something for breakfast, I examined our surroundings. We had stopped just below a point where the creek burst through a narrow cleft in the mountains and made a sheer descent of some twenty feet. At the base of the ledge and almost directly underneath the waterfall I noticed a hole in the rocks that seemed partially lighted from the rear. I could readily see it by crawling on my hands and knees. I found the hole was the entrance to a passage about twelve feet in length that, after an abrupt turn, ended in an irregular chamber 10x20 feet in its greatest measurements. It was clean and fairly lighted beside the creek above the falls. It was a splendid stronghold, furnished right to our hands. One man could have held it against 100.

"When Bell returned we moved our few effects into the cave and considered ourselves secure. For a week we worked hard together, not even taking ordinary precautions against surprise, so greedy were we for the yellow dust. Looking back at this now it seems nothing less than miraculous that we were not surprised and killed and I can not comprehend how we could be so careless. Our buckskin bags filled rapidly and we were talking one morning just outside our cave of returning to Spring creek to tell of our good fortune when a score of bullets came whizzing from the rocks and trees around us. Bill was struck in the thigh and I received slight wounds in the leg and arm.

"We darted into our hole with the Indians yelling right behind us. One savage fiend seized me by the heels and had nearly dragged me back in reach of his companions' tomahawks when Bell sent a bullet through his brain. Before I could be caught again I was inside and out of danger. The Indians poured a perfect storm of lead into the mouth of the cave for a time. As we made no sound in reply they concluded we were killed and crowded up to get our scalps. Three of them were good Indians before they could realize that we were not in scolding condition and could get out of range. Then they began their howls and their shooting anew, but their bullets simply fattened against the angle in the wall.

"Finding this useless they began to look for other means of dislodging us. They soon discovered the fissure and began shooting down it with renewed yell. Presently they tried the effect of their fusillade by waving one of their headresses before the entrance on the end of a pole. As we did not shoot at it they felt certain they had finished us and crowded up to the hole again. It cost the lives of two of them to find out their mistake that time. After this they settled themselves for a regular siege.

"We then had to dress our wounds as best we could and consider our predicament.

We were safe from the bullets of the savages, but we had not a mouthful of food nor a drop of water, and our wounds already began to make us thirsty. How we cursed our improvidence then. We would gladly have given all our gold for a single day's rations of food and water. Besides, it was chilly in the cave, even in that August weather, and our wounds were very painful. Our situation was one of hourly increasing horror, while death, frightful and inevitable, loomed in the background.

"All that day we could hear the Indians prowling around outside, but they made no further demonstrations. Toward evening our sufferings from thirst became something awful. We licked the damp stones for moisture. About dark the Indians tried to smoke us out by dropping a great heap of burning wood in front of the entrance from the ledge above. The smoke went straight up, however, instead of coming into the cave. After that they let us alone until next day noon. We were getting weak from hunger, thirst, and loss of blood, and had nearly given up hope.

"It must have been about 1 o'clock when we noticed a little stream of water trickling through the crevice. We tried to shout a prayer of gratitude as we looked up the precious fluid, but our parched throats uttered no sound. Soon the stream increased until we were standing knee deep in cold, spring water. Then we understood that the Indians had dammed the creek so as to turn it into the cave. Our previous sufferings were nothing to what we now had to endure. We were soon numb with cold and in our weakened condition it required our greatest exertions to keep from sinking down into the water and drowning. How we ever lived though that long afternoon I do not know. We determined to make a dash for our lives as soon as it became dark.

"Fortune favored us in our attempt for a heavy downpour of rain began at sundown and kept up nearly all night. An hour after dark we dropped on our knees and crept out. The water so nearly filled the entrance that we almost strangled. The night was inky black and the heavy storm had driven the besiegers to shelter, so we were not discovered.

"We followed the creek for half a mile and then started out in the direction of Spring creek. Once out of immediate danger nature asserted herself and we both sank utterly exhausted before we had proceeded another mile. Luckily Bell chanced to drop down near a young rabbit which we caught and tore to pieces and devoured while the flesh was yet quivering. This revived us somewhat and after resting a while we got up and struggled on again.

"About noon the next day we crawled into the camp at Spring Creek—more dead than alive. Some of the men were just preparing to return to Fort Pierre and I was permitted to stretch my pain racked bones upon the top of a load, and in this way reached home. I had a raging fever all the way and was delirious part of the time. I kept my bed for six months afterward and have been disabled by rheumatism ever since.

"I returned to the hills five years later, and have accumulated some property, but for all the wealth of the Black Hills I would not again endure the horrors of those two days and nights in the cave."

Special and Annual Meeting OF THE ONTARIO MUTUAL LIFE.

THE attendance of members of this Company at its Nineteenth Annual Meeting, in Waterloo, on May 23rd, 1889, though not quite as large as in some former years, was, as usual, both influential and representative.

The President, E. E. Bowman, Esq., M. P., having taken the chair, on motion the Secretary of the Company, W. H. Riddell, Esq., acted as Secretary of the Special and of the Annual Meeting.

The provisions of the Act passed at the last session of the Dominion Parliament to amend the Company's charter, having been explained by the chairman, on motion it was unanimously approved of, whereupon the Special General Meeting was dissolved.

THE ANNUAL MEETING of the Company was then held. The Secretary having read the notice calling the meeting, on motion the minutes of the last Annual Meeting were taken as read, and confirmed. The President then reported.

DIRECTORS REPORT. It affords our Directors, much pleasure, in submitting the following statement of the affairs of our Company, to be able to report to the members that the next results of the business transacted during the year 1888 exceeds that of any previous year. The new assurance issued, amount to \$2,619,650; under 1,605 policies, and the total amount in force on 31st December is \$12,041,914, under 9,398 policies. The total assets of the Company, as at the close of the year 1888, exceeds that of any previous year, and has been fully maintained.

Our total assets as at 31st December last amounted to \$1,313,383 and our surplus over and above all liabilities has reached the handsome sum of \$90,357.69, which is a very satisfactory showing after the liberal annual distributions which have hitherto been made. A portion of this surplus will be held in hand as a provision against future reductions in the rate of interest and other contingencies. Our expense account for 1888 is about \$2,000 less than that of 1887, while the business transacted is considerably greater; and the ratio of expense has been reduced to 13.5 per cent, showing a reduction of 2 per cent as compared with the previous year.

The policies in force at the close of the year have been valued by the officers of the Government Insurance Department and the reserve required to be held has been certified as correct by the Superintendent of Insurance for the Dominion. The report of the annual Auditor, the Executive Committee of the board, and a very careful examination in detail all the securities embraced in this general statement of assets and found them correct and in proper order. The detailed statement prepared and duly certified to by the Board and the Officers and Agents having been tendered and responded to, the meeting was brought to a close. The Directors met subsequently, and re-elected E. E. Bowman, President, and under the amended charter elected G. T. Lane, Vice-President, and Robert L. E. Bowman, Vice-President of the Company for the ensuing year.

FUN GRAMS.

An open question—Where's the cork screw? A wise champagne cork that knows its own popper. Secretaries of public meetings are sometimes unable to make sixty minutes in an hour. Somebody says a man can get roaring drunk on water. Well, so he can on land.

War often follows peace. Especially is this so when it happens to be a piece of mince pie. There is very little profit in manufacturing strawberry boxes for the trade. The bottoms come too high. A thief who stole a mirror was imprisoned for theft and fined for drunkenness. He had taken a glass too much.

There are two classes of people whom a sensitive man avoids—those whom he fears he may bore and those who he knows will bore him. A whale from Atlantic City is to be sent to Washington. It will not be lonely—Washington is just now full of whales.

Amelie Rives (Chanler) contributes a poem on "Love's Seasons" to Harper's Bazaar. There is only two seasons to love of the Rives variety. One is red pepper, and the other is more pepper.

Judging from the formidable preparations made for executing criminals by electricity in the state of New York, it seems certain that after a man has once tried the new way he won't patronize any other.

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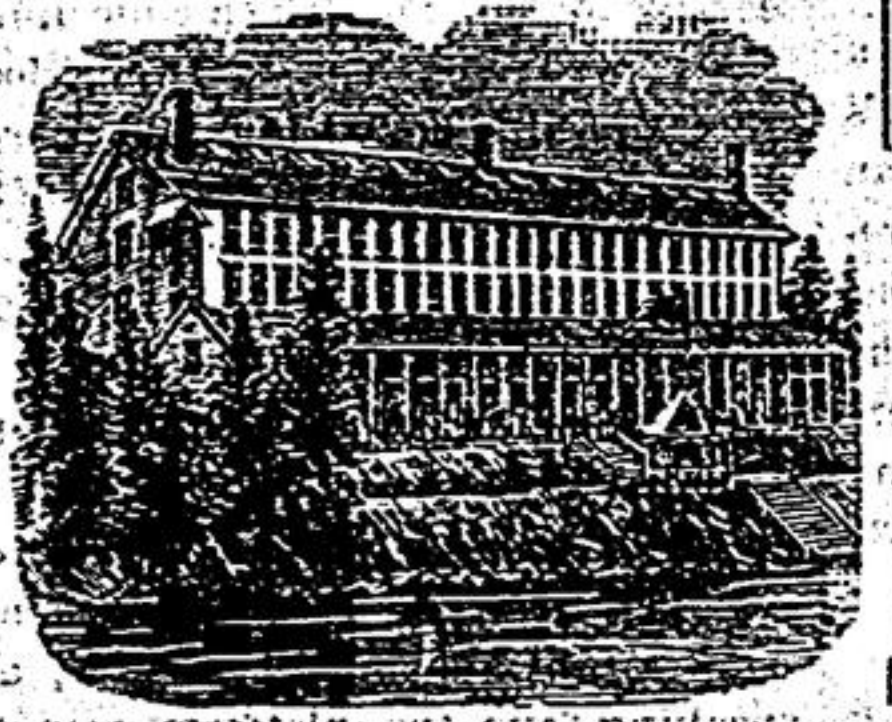
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