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Dogs For the Klondike

The spectacle of great tides of men sweeping hither and thither across the face of the globe under suasion of so mean a passion as cupidity, as the waters of oceans are led by the moon, is more spectacular than pleasant. See in it however much one prophetically may of future empire and civilizations growing where none grew before—hear as one can on every breeze that blows from the newest and richest placers the him of the factory to be, the song of the plowman (such as it is) and the drone of the Sunday sermon, replacing “the petulant pop of the pistol”—yet one cannot be altogether insensible to the hideousness of the motive out of which all these pleasing results will come.

Doubtless in looking at the pond-lily a healthy mind makes light account of the muck and slime at the bottom of the pond, whence it derives its glories; but while the muck and slime only are in evidence, the water and the flower more presumptions of the future, the case is a trifle different.

It is conceded that out of this mad movement to the Klondike great good may come. Many of those who go to dig will remain to plow, jocosely driving their teams afield to tickle the tundra till it laughs in pineapples, bananas and guavas. It is not denied that great cities (with roof-gardens and slums) will rise like exhalations along the mighty Yukon, nor that that noble stream will know the voice of the gondolier and the lute of the lover. In place of the moose and the caribou, the patient camel will kneel in the shade of the palms to receive his cargo of dates, spices and native silks.

But just now the Klondike region is a trifle raw and, if one may venture to say so, “jay.” In the stark simplicity of life there men do not veil their characters with a shining hypocrisy; all, by their presence in that unutterable country, being convicted of the greed for gold—than which no vice is more detestable—every man feels that, having “given himself away,” it is useless to profess any of the virtues; as the discharged inmate of a reformatory institution has no choice but a life of crime. Later, when the beneficent influences that track the miner to his gulch shall have set up a more complex social system under which the presumption of a base motive may be less strong we shall hear, doubtless, of Dawsonians and even Skagawayans who would take the trouble to deny an accusation of theft and to alarm a disposition to go to church between drinks on a Sunday.

Ugly as these “rushes” to mining regions seem to one unskilled in use of the muckrake and a stranger to “dreams of avarice”—discouraging as they are to the good optimist, and correspondingly delightful to his natural enemy, the wicked pessimist—yet it must be confessed that in the present one there is one feature that goes far in mitigation of its general unpleasantness: it has created in distant and unwholesome regions a demand for the domestic dog.

For the first time in his immemorial existence this comfortable creature has thrown open to him a wide field of usefulness of exactly the kind that he deserves—a long way from the comforts of home, imperfectly supplied with beefsteaks, cold as blazes, with plenty of hard work and the worst society in the world!

“Good long-haired dogs”—a phrase which in strict accuracy would mean dead ones—are “quoted” in Dawson at one hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars. Such prices ought to result in drawing all that kind of dog out of California, which in itself would be a great public benefaction; for the popular belief in the superior virtues of the long-haired dog is a lamentable error. The type and exemplar of that variety, the so-called Newfoundland, is, in point of general, all-round unworth, superior to any living thing that we have the advantage to know. Not only is his bite more deadly than that of the ordinary snapdog, but that of the fleas which he cherishes is peculiarly insupportable. The fleas of all other dogs merely sadden; those of the Newfoundland incite to crime! His fragrance, moreover, is less modest than that of even the Skye terrier; it is distinctly declarative indeed. A charming fiction ascribes to him a tender solicitude for drowning persons, especially children; but history may be searched in vain for a single authentic instance—and history is not over-scrupulous in the matter of veracity. Every one has heard and read of rescues from drowning by Newfoundland dogs, but no human being ever saw one. It is to be hoped that the hyperborean demand for “good, long-haired dogs” will not fall upon heedless ears.

The Great Dane is not a “long-haired” dog, but he is large and strong, and should be wanted in the Klondike country. His size and strength would there be his best recommendations; here they are his worst. Having a giant’s strength he uses it as a giant, and his multiplication in the land is a terror and a curse. His manner of unloading a bicycle has been justly described as “the acme of inconsiderateness.” Moreover he is increasing all the time in magnitude, as well as in quantity; at his present rate of growth he will within a decade or so overtop the horse and outweigh the ox. There will be no resisting him. But what an excellent roadster he would be in Alaska! The brevity of his hair is really an advantage: in calculating his load less allowance will need to be made for icicles. Indubitably the value of a Great Dane in Dawson is at least one thousand dollars.

The most pernicious varieties of the species—the small animated pestilences upon which our ladies waste so much of the affection which, it is reverently submitted, might with better results be bestowed upon the males of their own species—these pampered laplings are unfortunately not useful for draught purposes in the Arctic. One of them could not pull a tin plate from Squottacoota to Nickalinqua. So they are not “quoted” in the Dawson market reports. But something has been overlooked: the incomparable excellence of their flesh! It is respectfully suggested that a few of these curled darlings and glossy sweethearts be sent to the Klondike, suitably canned and spiced, as commercial samples. The miners may be assured that the flesh is not only wholesome, but is entirely free from that objectionable delicacy that distinguishes, for example, the yellow-legged pullet; it is honestly rank and strong and has plenty of “chaw in it”—just the right kind of meat for founders of empires and heralds of civilization. A dozen cans of Dandy Dinmont or King Charles Spaniel should have in Dawson an actual value of three thousand dollars, but doubtless could be supplied at a much smaller price. So much as that would hardly be needed in say one outfit, for such is the nutritious property of small dog that most persons would find a single can of it enough. Let the Yukon Basin send its orders and confidently rely upon the Californian dog-thief to fill them.

California is able to supply all Alaska and the Northwest Territory with dogs and with dog. Every township in this state has always a surplus. We invite attention to our peerless canine wealth and to the eminent fitness of its units for service on the northern trails and along the northern alimentary canal. Before purchasing elsewhere let the judicious Klondiker examine our stock. He is too far away to look at it, but when the wind is in the southeast he can smell it.