

## A TRAMP'S TRIALS.

(A Story from Life by I. Israel Walker)

Perched high up in the rigging of the old ship Willamette, as she weighed anchor and slowly moved out from the wharf at Seattle, might have been seen a specimen of humanity known by the common name of Tom Jones.

The ship was one of the first to take a load in that mad rush to the Alaska gold fields in the latter part of last century. It was destined for Skagway and was loaded with 1000 passengers, 110 crew, 240 horses and cattle and thousands of tons of freight.

Tom Jones was one of the three Negro passengers that made up that mass of mad, struggling humanity, crazed by the wondrous tales of gold finds and excited by individual expectation.

He, in order to take a last fond look at the city of Seattle and also to get a last glance from a pair of feminine eyes on shore, had climbed high up in the rigging and was huddled up like some long, lean, hungry, cadaverous animal about to spring on those below him. It was Tom's first ocean voyage, and knowing that they would be at sea several days and not being familiar with steamship regulations he had provided himself with such things as his ignorance had suggested. He had lemons to prevent seasickness, crackers and cheese to stay hunger, and a tomato can filled with fresh water from the city hydrant. These were Tom's personal and private belongings. His outfit with the hundreds of others was stored in the ship's hold.

The voyage was to him exceedingly pleasant. He was always pleased when the gong sounded for meals, for being long and lean he could squeeze through the crowd and reach over their heads and dive deep into the Irish stew as the flunkey came by with it in a dirty tin pail. He was always on time for breakfast, as a donkey occupied the adjoining compartment and would begin to bray as soon as day began to illumine the eastern horizon. Thus Tom was always awaked on time.

Nothing of importance occurred on the trip up and from that point we will use Tom's own words:

"We dropped anchor in the harbor at Skagway on Friday morning at daybreak, amid the lowing of cattle, braying of donkeys and barking of hundreds of poor half-starved Indian dogs that lined the shores.

"Skagway was a city of tents; as it had only been started two weeks it had no houses. Its population consisted of about three thousand men, eleven women and a few Indians. There being no wharves, we were forced to drop anchor some distance from shore and to unload our vessel in small boats. It took us a week to unload the ship. I say we, for the passengers had to unload the ship, and board themselves while doing so. I boarded at a restaurant (I beg apologies for misusing the word in connection with such a place) where the bill of fare was not changed but interchanged. For breakfast we had coffee, bread and beans; for dinner, beans, bread and coffee, and for supper, bread, coffee and beans. For this sumptuous meal we paid four dollars and a half a day. When our goods were unloaded we moved; along with all who intended going to Dawson; to the first camp, it being four miles from town and was known as Lyarsville. From this place the long and tedious ascent of the mountains began. And you could see thousands of men with packs on

their backs, and hundreds of horses, loaded almost to the back-breaking point, struggling, pushing, climbing, falling and swearing as they made their way toward the summit. By winter three thousand horses had been killed on the trail and hundreds of the men had become discouraged and leaving their outfits had returned to the States. My goods were scattered in small piles for 20 miles along the mountains. And 'Tom Jones' could be seen on piles of goods as often and regular as mile posts on a country road. We were among the many who started that fall and did not get across the mountains, so when fall came we built a cabin and settled down for winter, and waited for spring when we could go over the ice.

"In the spring the rush was even greater than in the fall. Ten thousand people were scattered along that 40 miles of trail—all working and struggling to get to the lakes.

"On Easter Sunday I saw my first pioneer funeral, where we dug a hole as best we could in the frozen ground and wrapping the corpse in a cloth dumped it into the hole and covered it up, without a coffin, without a minister, without mourners, without flowers or fond good-byes. I have seen many such since that day, but that one left an impression on my memory that will never be effaced. For two months we pulled away at our hand sleds, moving our goods, sleeping on the ice, eating our bacon and beans and working like Russian prisoners in the salt mines. We reached Lake Windy Arm the last of April with all our effects and could sing that familiar song, 'Troubles Over.'

"I immediately started back to the postoffice for our mail. I had ninety miles to walk and had to carry my bedding, food and cooking utensils on my back. I assure you I did not mind this since I was going to receive news from the outside world. Nothing of importance occurred going to the postoffice, but my trip back was (as I see it now) exceedingly dangerous. The ice had begun to melt and walking on it was very dangerous. I had to return by way of Lake Bennett and had 29 miles to walk on that treacherous ice. I found a man going in the same direction and we decided to travel in company. We tied a long rope around our waists and walked far apart so that when one broke through the ice the other could pull him out. The lake is three miles wide and we had to walk in the center, as the sides were thawed. Our weight and the motion of our walking would make the ice go up and down like waves of water. This kept up until late in the afternoon we both became seasick and had to lay down on the ice and wait until dark before finishing our journey. We broke through hundreds of times, but managed to pull each other out. We were wet, cold and hungry, when about about daybreak the next morning we reached the foot of the lake and made camp on its snow-covered shore. We were the last persons to walk over the lake that spring, for the two men who attempted to follow our tracks the next day are sleeping peacefully at the bottom today.

"On arriving at our camp I found it had taken me eleven days to go to the postoffice and back, and that I had walked 195 miles, but I was satisfied as I received 21 letters and several papers.

"After two days' rest we went into the woods to fell trees, to whipsaw lumber and to build a boat for our six hundred miles trip down stream. We