

PLEASANT HOURS

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ESKIMO KINDLING FIRE.

The Canadian Children of the Cold

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To aid me in presenting the earliest glimpses of the Eskimo, I am fortunate in having before me a manuscript prepared by the late Robert Morrow, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, an accomplished student of the literatures of Iceland and Denmark.

That to the Norseman, and not to the Spaniards, rightfully belongs the credit of first discovering America is now settled, and that when the Norsemen first touched American soil they found the Eskimo already in possession is also certain. Yet it was not these bold adventurers who gave this curious people the name by which they are most generally known.

When Eric the Red sailed across from Iceland to Greenland (somewhere about the year 985), he found many traces of the Eskimo there; and when Thorvald, some twenty years later, ventured as far south as Vinland, identified as the present Martha's Vineyard (with which he was so delighted that he exclaimed: "Here is beautiful land, and here I wish to raise my dwelling"); the unexpected discovery of three skin boats upon the beach affected him and his followers much as the imprint of a human foot did Robinson Crusoe. They found more than the boats, however; for each boat had three men, all but one of whom were caught and summarily despatched, for reasons that the saga discreetly forbears to state.

RETRIBUTION.

No sooner had the invaders returned to their ships than the natives attacked them in great force, and although the Norsemen came out best in the fighting, their leader, Thorvald, received a mortal wound. After the lapse of two years, one Thorinn Karlsefne, fired by what he heard of the wonderful discoveries made by the hardy sons of Eric the Red, fitted out an imposing expedition, his boats carrying one hundred and sixty men, beside women, cattle, etc., and set sail for Vinland. He reached his destination in safety, and, remaining there for some time, improved upon his predecessor's method of treating the natives. Instead

of aimlessly killing them, he cheerfully cheated them, getting large packs of furs in exchange for bits of red cloth.

After two years of prosperous trading, the relations between the Norsemen and the natives became strained, and they were vanquished by sheer force of numbers, and deemed it prudent to make off without standing upon the order of their going.

With the departure of the Norsemen,

THE CURTAIN OF OBSCURITY

falls upon the Eskimo, and is not lifted again until we find them, not luxuriating amid the vine-entangled forests of Vinland, but scattered far and wide over the hideous desolation of the hard north, and engaged in a ceaseless struggle with hunger and cold. Just when they thus moved northward, and why, does not appear. If their innate and intense hatred of the Red Indian be of any service as a clue, it is, however, within the bounds of reason to believe that they were driven from their comfortable quarters by their more active and warlike fellow-aborigines, and given no rest until they found it amidst the icebergs and glaciers of Labrador and Hudson's Bay, where they may now be met with in bands numbering from a dozen to a hundred or more. Throughout the whole of this Arctic region they fearlessly range in search of food.

The Eskimo are, in fact, the only inhabitants of

A VAST TERRITORY

which includes the shores of Arctic America, the whole of Greenland, and a tract about four hundred miles long on the Asiatic coast beyond Behring's Straits, thus extending over a distance of from five thousand miles east to west, and three thousand two hundred miles from north to south. Notwithstanding this wide distribution, there is a remarkable uniformity, not only in the physical features of the Eskimo, but also in their manners, traditions, and language.

THE MORAVIAN MISSIONARIES,

who, with an heroic zeal that only those familiar with their lot can adequately appreciate, have devoted themselves to "the cure of souls" among the Eskimo. There are six of these Moravian missions scattered along the eastern coast of Labrador. Nain, the chief one, was established as far back as 1771, Okkak in 1776, Hopedale in 1782, and Hebron, Zoar, and Ramah more recently.

The bestowal of no attractive Biblical names helps very little, however, to mitigate the unfavourable impression produced by the forbidding surroundings of these tiny oases almost lost in a seemingly illimitable desert.

THE ESKIMO

are, as a rule, small of stature, not much exceeding five feet. Those upon the western shore, however, are taller and more robust; they are quite strongly built, with hair and beard sweeping down over their shoulders and chest. When the good seed sown by the patient missionary finds lodgment in a Husky's heart, he usually signalizes his adoption of Christianity by indulging in a clean shave, or at least by cutting his beard short with a pair of scissors.

They all have small, soft hands, broad shoulders, big, flat faces, large, round heads, and short, stubby noses, and very generous mouths, which, being nearly always on the broad grin, make free display of fine rows of sharp, white teeth. At spring-time,

when the sun's burning rays are reflected from glistening banks of snow, they become almost as black in the face as negroes, but new-born babes may be seen as fair as any Canadian infant. Their eyes are small and almost uniformly black, and peer brightly out at you from beneath a perfect forest of brow and lash. Their hair is black, also, and very thick and coarse.

THEIR ORDINARY FOOD

is the flesh of the seal, with its attendant blubber, and the fish that abounds along the shores. They are not particular whether their dinner is cooked or not. They are also very partial to tallow, soap, fish oil, and such things, which they look upon as great delicacies—a big tallow candle being rather more of a treat to an Eskimo youngster than a stick of candy to a civilized small boy.

THE SEA

is, in fact, everything to the Eskimo. What the buffalo was to the American Indian, what the reindeer is to the European Laplander, all that, and still more, is the seal to these Children of the Cold. Upon its meat and blubber they feed. With its fur they are clothed. By its oil they are warmed and lighted. Stretched upon appropriate frame-work, its skin makes them seaworthy boats and weather-proof tents; while, unkindest use of all, with the bladder they float the fatal harpoon that wrought its own undoing.

There is not much room for

FASHION'S IMPERIOUS SWAY

in Labrador. Seal-skin from scalp to toe is the invariable rule, and there would be no small difficulty in distinguishing between the sexes if the women did not indulge in a certain amount of ornamentation upon their garments. Still another distinguishing mark, permissible, however, only to those who have attained the dignity of motherhood, is the "amook," a capacious hood hung between the shoulders, which forms the safest and snugest of all carrying-places for the babies.

Lieutenant Gordon bears this testimony as to the moral status of the Eskimo at Hudson's Bay: "One word may be said in regard to their honesty. Although scraps of iron and wood possess a value to them which we can hardly appreciate, they would take nothing without first asking leave. Not even a chip or broken nail was taken without their first coming for permission to the officer who was on duty."

No doubt the fact that practical

LIQUOR PROHIBITION

prevails has something to do with this commendable showing. The law, aided and abetted by the vigilant missionaries, shuts out everything stronger than lime juice, and the path of the Eskimo is free from the most seductive and destructive of all temptations, except when some unprincipled whaler offers him a pull out of his flask.



NIPPED IN THE ICE.

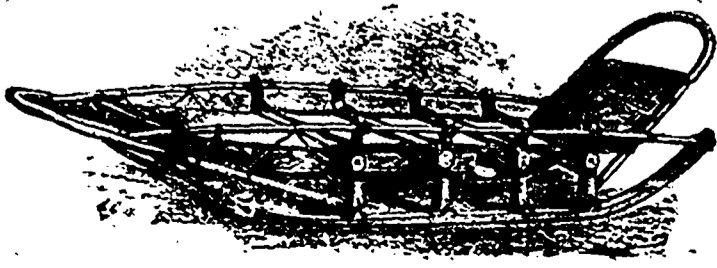
The doctrine that cleanliness is next to godliness finds few adherents in Eskimo land. The rule seems to be to eschew washing throughout the year, and many a mighty hunter goes through life innocent of a bath, unless, indeed, he should happen to be tumbled out of his "kayak" by some irate walrus.

THEIR INTELLIGENCE

is considerable. In some instances they display not only a taste but a talent for music, chart-making, and drawing. One case is mentioned where a mere lad drew an excellent outline of the coast for over a hundred miles, indicating its many irregularities with astonishing accuracy. They are capital mimics, and are apt at learning the songs and dances of their white visitors. But they are poor men of business. They generally leave to the purchaser the fixing of the price of anything they have to sell.

Stealing and lying were unknown among them until these "black arts" were introduced by the whites as products of civilization, and unhappily, the natives are proving apt pupils. They are also somewhat given to gambling. Although by no means without courage, they seldom quarrel and never go to war with one another.

The future destiny of this interesting race may be readily forecast. All over the vast region he inhabits are signs showing that his numbers were far greater once than they are at present. The insatiable greed of his white brothers is rendering his existence increasingly difficult. The seal and the walrus are ever being driven farther north, and that means a sterner and shorter struggle for life. As the Indian will not long survive the buffalo, so the Eskimo will not long survive the seal. There are, perhaps, fifteen thousand of them now scattered far and wide over the tremendous spaces between Labrador and Alaska. Each year their numbers are growing less, and ere long the last remnant of the race will have vanished, and the great lone North will return to the state of appalling solitude and silence that only the Canadian Children of the Cold had the fortitude to alleviate by their presence.



ESKIMO SLED.



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