

SOME ASPECTS OF LIFE AND WORK IN COLD REGIONS.

[Registered in accordance with the Copyright Act of 1875.]

By THE REV. FRED. E. J. LLOYD, SHIGAWAKE, P. Q.



WE continue our observations on the Eskimo. The writer of these articles once had the happiness of ministering to the spiritual wants of a family of Eskimo Indians, of his intercourse with whom he has many pleasant and some amusing memories. The family comprised two sons, two daughters and their parents. These latter were more than usually dusky as to their complexion; that of their offspring, on the contrary, was unusually light, and indeed, but for their broad facial features, might have easily passed for Europeans in this particular. They came originally from one of the Moravian mission-stations on the northern coast of Labrador, and, finding none of their co-religionists in the island of Newfoundland, they sought shelter within the fold of the Anglican branch of Christ's Church. Mr. Marks (for that was the family name) was a person of much skill and ingenuity, particularly in the matter of repairing clocks and watches, on which account his services were in almost constant demand by the white settlers. In common with the rest of their race, every member of this family possessed a very musical voice capable of producing the softest, richest and most sympathetic tones. They sang together, with much good taste and feeling, a few of the unapproachable, grand and massive German chorales which they had learnt, years before, from their Moravian teachers. They sang, it need hardly be said, in their native tongue, and its peculiarly liquid sounds added much to the beauty of the music. They all spoke English fairly well. They were very poor, but apparently quite happy and contented. Their home was a compromise between an Eskimo wigwam and a white man's dwelling, and, like all compromises, very unsatisfactory, and in this particular instance eminently unlovely. With the true instinct of the Eskimo, who are after all an indolent race and much averse to every form of exertion, Mr. Marks had erected the aforementioned architectural abortion on the edge of a forest in the midst of game, and near the sea shore in the vicinity of seals, albeit a long way from any other human habitation. While travelling on one occasion in the neighborhood I called as usual upon the Eskimos. After prayers and a short chat, I asked my hostess if she would make me a cup of tea, at the same time drawing out a small package of black tea from my pocket with which I furnished myself before setting out in case of an emergency. But had I known the state of embarrassment into which my request would plunge the dear old woman, I should have continued my journey unrefreshed, at least with tea, and in a much happier frame of mind. She first looked at me and then at the mysterious package in silent bewilderment; next, she cast a stupefied glance at the

stove, which was very much the worse for wear; and finally at a rickety shelf upon which there stood two or three cups without handles and a cracked basin. Last of all, as if in the deepest depths of despair, she looked timidly at me and stammered out in broken English, "No teapot, sir, no mistake!" I was very much tempted to laugh aloud, but did not, and, after pointing to one of the aforementioned cups, telling Mrs. Marks at the same time to use it in lieu of a teapot, she seemed quite reassured and made the tea. There ensued a good deal of pleasant banter anent our extemporised teapot, during which I supped a dish of tea and continued my journey.

The Eskimo is, before every thing else, a hunter. At one time the wily seal is the object of his skill and prowess, at another the walrus, narwhal or other marine animals, and last of all, during the winter months, the fleet footed and keen witted deer. In the Mackenzie River territory partridge and wild goose hunting absorbs a large amount of the time and attention of the Eskimo in the spring and autumn. The truth, however, must be told, that nothing short of the immediate prospect of starvation will induce the naturally indolent Eskimo to "go a hunting." Whole families of the Greenland Eskimo have been known to pass several days without any food during the summer months when sea birds innumerable and abundance of fish were to be obtained within a stone's throw of the wigwam, and this from genuine laziness. They will beg, borrow, steal or half starve themselves rather than undergo the small amount of exertion necessary to procure sufficient food. In spite, however, of this weakness of character, which is as natural to him as are the spots to the leopard, once aroused to action the male Eskimo exhibits the most remarkable powers of endurance, fleetness of foot, manual dexterity and indefatigable patience in his endeavours, which rarely prove unsuccessful, to secure his prey. He will follow the trail of the deer for days, the while bearing in his hand a heavy elongated harpoon with which the animal, when found, is slain. Similarly, he will watch hour after hour at a hole in the ice for the appearance of a seal, which, when it does appear, rarely gets away with its life. This latter animal is the most highly prized of all the forms of life found in the Arctic regions, for, whereas the deer, narwhal, walrus and fish, each in its own way contributes to one or more of the necessities of Eskimo life, the seal constitutes its all. It supplies the Eskimo with clothing, food and light, and even its bones afford material for hunting implements and articles of domestic use. The seal is hunted assiduously as well in summer as in winter; in the summer by means of a kayak or canoe, and in the winter on the ice. The Eskimo canoe is thus described by Mr. Ballantyne, "It is made of a light framework of wood, which is covered entirely over with seal skin, a round hole being left in the centre in which the Eskimo sits. Round this hole is a loose piece of skin, which is drawn up by the man