

# The LONG TRAIL of CANADIAN LAW

*Story of the alleged Eskimo murderers at Coppermine, in the Arctic Circle, covering four years of time and over 5,000 miles of space, comes to a head in a Trial at Edmonton*

Written from notes and photographs supplied en route.

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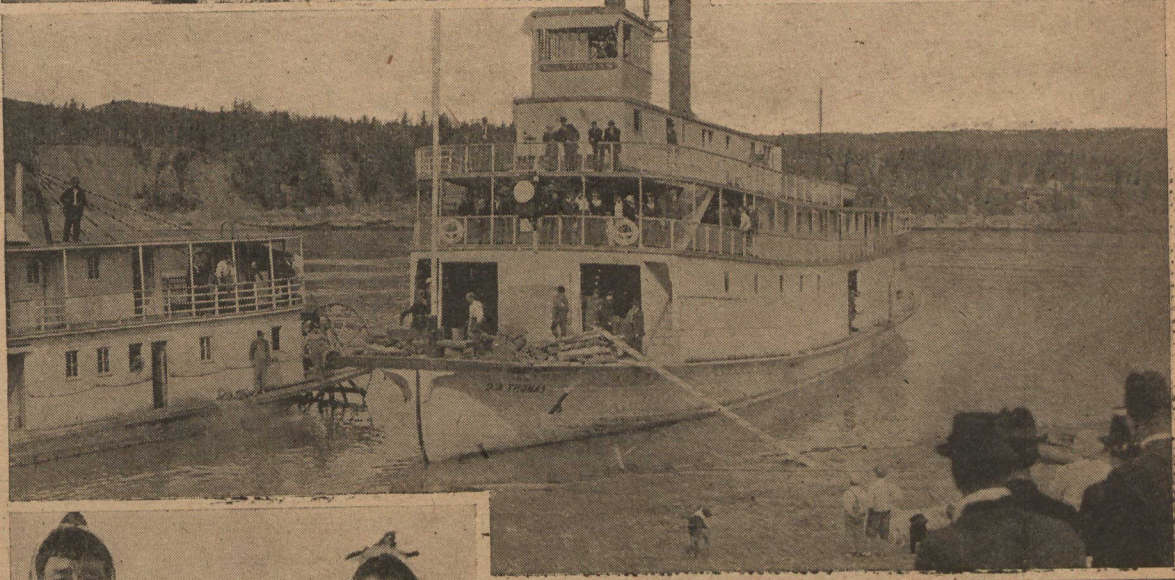
FOUR years ago about now two priests were killed by Eskimos 2,200 miles north of Edmonton. What they expected to accomplish by converting this tribe of Copper Eskimos in the region of the Coppermine River is not known. But the priests were a long way from home and they must have had strange sensations when, for some reason or other, they found themselves among a hostile band in such an outlandish place. Only by recalling what these priests, Fr. Leroux and Fr. Rouvier may have felt like in that primeval copper country on the edge of the Great Barren Grounds of Great Bear Lake can we get the counter-idea of what the alleged murderers, Sinnisiak and Ulusuk felt like when, a few weeks ago, after a year's journey "up South," they found themselves in the clattering city of Edmonton, with more people on one street corner than can be found in a whole Coppermine camp of Eskimos.

The Copper tribe are the furthest north Eskimos in the world. Steffansen met them once and swapped them guns and powder for furs. Odd glimpses of these caribou-hunters have been got now and then by an explorer crossing the Great Bear. The nearest Indians to these "huskies" are the Yellow-Knives, said to have got their name from their big copper knives. When asked where they got their knives, they have explained—from the Eskimos eastward, of whom they are afraid; because these Eskimos are said to have retained the art of tempering copper sufficiently to make a blade, useful for skinning caribou. The copper, remember, of the Coppermine district, is small mountains of almost "free" metal, and these Eskimos live among it.

They are a very backward tribe, still using bows and arrows, with occasional guns; depending on the caribou for existence; a simple, hospitable and happy people in no great need of conversion. Their regard for human life is, as may be easily understood, the grim principle that Darwin expounded, the survival of the physically fittest. All the old people who cannot keep up on the trail are left to perish. Babies born while on the hunt for caribou are left in the snow to die, as the women are on a par with the men and do their share of hunting and packing, and a nursing child weakens the mother.

Only imagination can realize what a crude, cruel country of copper and caribou, of magic and midnight suns, produces the primitive life of these Eskimos, and therefore how courageous must have been the two priests who went among them. Fascinating books could be written about the country of the Coppermine, which is as full of legends and miracle ideas as the barren grounds swarm with caribou; and just above this land, on its very edge, is the land of the mysterious musk-ox.

THE killing of the priests was in 1913. News of the event got out to the nearest police post in 1915, because the Coppermine region is the most remote and inaccessible region inhabited by anybody in this country. A patrol party consisting of Inspector La Nauze and Constable Wight outfitted and started for the Coppermine as soon as possible. Their instructions were to find the probable murderers and bring them to Edmonton, 2,200 miles about as the crow flies. The party went as far as Fort Norman on the Mackenzie, before starting on the real outpost party of the journey. Here they let the boat go on "down North" to the mouth of the Mackenzie, sending word to the police just at Herschell Island that Corporal Bruce, stationed there at the whaling post, should proceed from there to the Coppermine and meet them at such-and-so a point. Somewhere on



Sinnisiak and Ulusuk sawing wood at Herschell Island to keep themselves in condition for the rest of the journey.

D. A. Thomas, the boat that brought the party down from Herschell Island to Peace River.

The Eskimos shed their native caribou-skin togs when they got into the chinook belt on the way "up south."

At Peace River barracks, left to right: Patsy, Eskimo half-breed witness; the two prisoners; Koeha, another witness, and Inisiak, interpreter.

