

# Among the Eskimos in Alaska

By the REV. S. H. GAPP

Charles Sumner suggested the name "Alaska" for "Russian America," when the United States bought the land from Russia in 1867. It is said to be a corruption of "Al-ay-ek-sa," meaning perhaps "great land" or "main land." The price paid was one-half cent an acre or \$7,000,000 in gold, plus \$200,000 for expenses connected with the transfer. This indicates the enormous size of the Territory. It was a bargain, but the American public greeted the purchase with contempt and called it: "The Zero Islands," "Andy Johnson's Polar Bear Gardens," "Seward's Ice Box," "Seward's Folly," "Walrussia," "The Polar Bear Treaty."

That part of the *tundra* or "plain," found in the lower Kuskokwim Basin is a flat, low-lying country, only a few feet above the level of Bering Sea. This district extends approximately one hundred to one hundred fifty miles into the interior which is very mountainous.

Only one quarter of Alaska's area lies within the Arctic Zone. There are three distinct climatic provinces. The summers are short and extremely moist and foggy but comparatively warm (50 to 58 F.). The winters are cold and dry with a mean temperature of from zero to 15 degrees below. The variation in temperature is said to be more extreme here than in any other part of the earth—from 100 above to minus 75 and only from 18 to 24 inches of the surface ever thaws. Frost has been found to a depth of 300 feet and nobody knows how much deeper it extends.

Scenery is said to be Alaska's most valuable natural resource. Fortunately it cannot be exported. Everything else is. But none of this wonderful scenery belongs to the *tundra*, but the folks there do see the wonderful Northern Lights.

The enormous wealth of the Territory in fisheries, mineral resources and timber does not come from the *tundra*, and fishing for export is prohibited by law in the Yukon and Kuskokwim. Mineral resources are found in the mountains. There is no timber on the *tundra* where the natives hunt fur-bearing animals. They use fur for clothing, and since the advent of the white man (whom they call "Cossack") they exchange furs for tobacco, sugar, hard-tack, clothing, rifles, ammunition, boats and outboard engines.

The physical condition of the terrain is uninteresting and an almost impossible habitat for human beings. It is flat and yet very uneven. "Niggerheads" or clumps of marsh grasses that lift up the moss make walking almost impossible in summer, when the *tundra* is a bog. No sand, ground, stones or trees. Only moss, gray,

brown or white, sedges, browse and lichens. In winter there is nothing but a frozen mass covered with snow. No roads—and none can ever be built unless they should build them on pyles "pumped" into the perpetual ice. They have no streets in the villages; at the mission stations boardwalks run from the house to the church and the store.

There is a surprising variety of vegetation on the *tundra* during the brief summer. Most of the flowers are only a few inches tall. There are no flashy colors among indigenous plants. The brilliant fire weed on the glacial silt banks of streams is exotic.

Animal life is strange only in that some varieties are missing. No rats, snails, snakes, spiders, centipedes, lizards, house flies and most of the insects so pestiferous in warm climates. Cold climate animals, game, fish and sea creatures are found in great abundance. The wildest animal is undoubtedly the mosquito. Unbelievable swarms of them make life almost unbearable for man and beast. Fortunately the malaria mosquito is unknown. Next to the mosquito is the little sandfly, known in other parts of the world as "punkies." An Eskimo name for them is said to mean: "the little thing that gives you a big itch."

There are few tame animals in this region. The natives know nothing about cats, horses or cows. There is, however, the wingless, usually flattened parasite that feeds on warm-blooded animals including man—the trench soldier's pet aversion. Everything is alive with them. The natives call them by several names one of which is supposed to mean: "my dear companion." They actually eat them and say the flavor is fine!

The most important domestic animal is the "malemute," or the far-famed Eskimo dog. He is half wolf and half dog, with the virtues of the one and the vices of the other. There is nothing this creature likes better than a dog-fight and he will attack anything that comes his way. Each dog gets a dried fish every evening when his work is done but the master provides no shelter, even in the coldest weather. A team of "huskies" will travel about forty miles a day. He is a beast of burden for sled, wheelbarrow, push-cart and acts as horse, mule, donkey, automobile, Pullman and freight train, all in one.

The people who live in this strange land are known as Eskimos. This is a corruption of a name given by Indians in the interior and is supposed to mean: "those who eat raw fish." They call themselves *Utes*, which means "people." They are nomads and live by hunting and fish-

ing. There is only one inhabitant for every ten square miles of territory.

The origin of the race has not definitely been determined but they are not Indians, though closely related to them. Their Mongolian origin is generally accepted for the children have the Mongol spots along the spinal column.

Unlike the Arctic Eskimos, the Yukon and Kuskokwim Utes are short, squarely built people, averaging about five feet or less. They have copper colored complexions and faces somewhat round. Occasionally the men grow thin beards and well-developed mustaches. Faces often indicate strength of character and personality. Children and young women sometimes have plump faces, somewhat attractive. They age rapidly and few become really old. The cheek-bones are higher than in the Indian and the cheeks broader; the lower lips are thick and eyebrows are protruding.

No real census of the entire Eskimo population has been taken but estimates range from 27,000 to 43,000. Mr. Rasmussen's figures are: Greenland, 13,000; Canada, 5,000; Siberia, 1,200; Alaska, 14,000; total, 33,200. The densest Eskimo population in the world is between the mouth of the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers.

## HOW ESKIMOS LIVE

Alaska Eskimos do not live in snow-houses. Their native places of abode are called igloos. They are dug-outs, with a low superstructure of poles picked up on the river bank, tied together with thongs of rawhide and covered with turf (moss) and in winter also with snow. A small hole on one side serves as entrance, covered with fur in cold weather. Many have vestibule storm shelters built in front of the entrance. The only window, made more for superstitious reasons than for ventilation, is a small hole in the roof. It is a wooden frame across which is tightly stretched a seal intestine. The igloo contains no furniture of any kind—no stove, bed, table, or chair; no cooking utensils or dishes. There are no sanitary arrangements, but there is plenty of filth and lice and a horrible odor. Light and heat are provided by a bowl-shaped piece of pottery filled with seal oil and with a wick of dried moss projecting over the edge. This gives more smoke than light. The air often becomes so impure that the flame dies down and folks can hardly breathe. The first time I entered an igloo, I stood in a cramped position for a while; then I shoved the window partly down the side of the roof so that I could stand erect. My feet sank deep in the mud of

the floor while my head projected majestically from the man-hole in the roof! Such a half-underground hole perhaps ten by twelve feet, may be the home of two or three squaws and their children.

The men and larger boys live in the *kashceem* or *kashige*—a sort of community house. A hole is dug into the glacial silt five to ten feet deep and about fifteen to twenty feet square. Logs, the branches of which have been ground off by ice in the river, are laid crosswise over the hole till there is a superstructure twelve or fifteen feet high. At the top there is a seal-intestine window a few feet square and the whole structure is covered with moss and glacial silt. Near the middle of the floor of the hole in the ground they dig a tunnel with a gentle slant upwards and reach the open air fifteen or eighteen feet from the *kashige*. Over this entrance a storm shelter is built and to enter the house you must crawl on hands and knees through this dark, smoky, mushy, filthy tunnel. In this place the men and big boys live, work, eat, sleep, loaf, gossip, chew and smoke tobacco, take their sweat-baths, hold their feasts and dances in honor of the dead.

Here, in the *kashige*, the missionary preaches the Gospel. When he arrives in a heathen village, he first obtains the consent of the chief to hold a meeting. When he asks permission for the women to attend, he is told that if the white man cares to have them come, yes, though really they have no business in the *kashige*. The men sit along the four walls, on benches made of split trees fastened against the wall about three feet from the ground. When the women enter, they modestly take their place on the floor and under the benches. In such a dirty hole the Gospel must be preached, except in summer, when meetings are held in the open air. In summer the natives live in tents at the fish, wood or hunting camps.

As can easily be imagined, health conditions are very bad. The commonest diseases are cuts, bruises, sores, skin troubles, boils, insanity, measles, diptheria, influenza, trachoma, pneumonia, rheumatism and especially tuberculosis. More than half the population is tubercular. Venereal disease is very common along the Yukon but not along the Kuskokwim. They show no resistance to influenza and tuberculosis; they usually die of the former and always of the latter. Accidents cause the second largest number of deaths. Until recently they knew nothing of whisky, or "fire-water." None are really long-lived. The women especially die early.

Medical treatment is virtually unknown. They had no idea of the medicinal use of herbs, after Indian fashion. Rubbing, blood-letting, the use of oil as a laxative, and a few things too disgusting to describe constitute the sum of their therapeutic practice—though most of them are

not therapeutic at all. An aching tooth is removed by holding the sharp point of a deer horn against its base and striking the other end of the horn with a heavier object—a large deer horn possibly—used as a mallet. They ascribe all sickness and pain, not to germs, but to evil spirits. Only the *shaman*, working by arrangement with the devil, has power over these evil spirits. Hence the hocus-pocus performed by the *shaman* is all that is ever done for the sick.

Death is terrible to the heathen Eskimo. Their indefinite ideas as to life after death and metempsychosis fill them with terror. The departed's *tarnera* (shade) is supposed to cling to the corpse four days—a woman's five days. Then it joins the *charaiyak* underground and becomes an evil spirit which must be propitiated.

Immediately after death, the corpse is dressed in the best clothes available and drawn up into the funeral posture—a sitting position, with heels pressing against the chest, the arms bent and against the body with the hands clasping the abdomen. Then the corpse is wrapped tightly in grass mats or fur and bound with rawhide. Superstition demands that it be lifted through the smoke-hole in the roof, or one made for that special purpose. Then the aperture is closed at once. If the body were taken through the door the spirit might find its way back into the igloo, and cause the death of another person. The corpse is laid on the driest spot in the vicinity and the implements of the departed are deposited around it. These may be intended for the long journey into the lower regions—but more likely the natives are afraid to use such implements, since the spirit of the dead might cling to them. Food is placed beside the body at intervals. Totem marks (seldom poles) may be displayed or monument boards erected with horrid images and masks, perhaps for the additional purpose of scaring away evil spirits. The dead were never buried until the missionary brought the tools with which graves could be dug in the frozen glacial silt.

Fur only was used for clothing until the white man came. The *parka*, or fur smock, is the outer garment for both men and women but the style is somewhat different for the two sexes. It is put on over the head and reaches almost to the ankle. It has a hood to be put over the head in bitter cold weather. Under the *parka*, the men wear fur trousers reaching from the ankle to the hips, where they are fastened by a draw-string. Socks are of deer-skin or woven grass, over which they wear fur boots. The lower garments of the women are combined boots and trousers reaching to the waist. In unusually severe weather they may wear a double set of furs—the lower set with the fur next the skin and the outer one with the hair on the outside. Waterproof

coats and boots are made from intestines and fish-skin. For thread, they use sinews from the reindeer's leg. The threads are very sensitive to water and, swelling the instant they become wet, prevents water from seeping through the needle-holes—originally the needles were sharpened pieces of bone. The women chewed the raw fur till it was soft enough to be pierced by such a fur needle. Mittens are made from the skins of dogs, reindeer, wolves, cormorants, hair-seal and salmon. Many Eskimo girls and young women, in centers where white men have settled, now dress in the latest American styles, and usually in flashy but not discordant colors.—*Missionary Review*.

(To be concluded.)

## California Sunshine

The society in San Jose, in the Santa Clara Valley, sends you greetings this week with the following from their reporter: "We haven't met as a Y. P. group since Easter but we surely have not forgotten or neglected to worship God. On Sunday, April 23, our choir, which includes most of the Y. P. members, journeyed to Stockton, a city about eighty miles northeast of San Jose, and sang our Easter Cantata in the Covenant church there. On the following Sunday we had the privilege of partaking of the blessings of the California annual missionary conference held in Oakland. On Saturday night, May 6, we had our first week night Y. P. meeting. We make only the third society in California to hold devotional meetings on a week night instead of Sunday afternoons, but we hope and pray that they will all be as successful as our first one."

The young folks in L. A. are having some unique Wednesday evening prayer meetings. They are called "Fireside Meetings." With the lights low, and the furniture arranged so as to give a homelike effect we meet to talk to God and I can praise the Lord here for many of us who have had answer to prayer from our Wednesday night meetings. We have a fireside in the corner of the room with a large rug in front of it. The piano is across on an angle on the other side of the room and then in between is a cozy chair, an end table and a lamp. The chairs are then arranged a bit more informally than usual and we have some great meetings.

It really does pay to pray. Some requests have been made for prayer one week, and the following week we hear that that prayer has been answered. L. A. is having a letter exchange on Sunday, June 18, so why don't some of you friends write us a line out here where the west begins. Those of you who have friends and relatives out here drop us a line and tell what you are doing in your corner.

"But thanks be unto God which gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 15:57.

P. K. M.

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(Concluded)

### Eskimo Life and Morals

The Eskimos live by hunting and fishing. Coldwater fish are found in unbelievable abundance. The main diet is salmon—dried, smoked, boiled, raw, frozen and rotten! The last named is the desert! They eat the eggs of migratory birds and the flesh of some game animals as well as the domesticated reindeer. They are fond of the intestines of the fox. The next most important item is "blubber"—the fat of seals, walrus, and beluga or white whale. They like their fat rancid. In the short summer they occasionally nibble at certain roots and leaves and use huckleberries in the fall, and cranberries which are frozen in winter.

Normally fish fairly swarm in the waters. Winter fishing through the ice, or watching a "blow-hole" for the seal to exhale and inhale, often means exposure to terrible weather.

Dr. Sheldon Jackson and the American government introduced the domesticated reindeer from Siberia in the decade from 1891 to 1901 and these animals have multiplied with astonishing rapidity. One purpose of their introduction has been accomplished for the Eskimo can eat his flesh when fish and blubber are scarce and can use the hides for clothing and bedding. But the reindeer has not raised the economic condition of the native. The reindeer meat is sold in the States by a great white corporation. The Eskimo has not

fruit." Because he mentions it in relationship to the brethren we infer that it applies to them. Bitterness, envy, jealousy, backbiting, gossip, etc., may result in falling short.

We must not forget that Jesus fully identifies himself with his brethren. What concerns them concerns him. When Saul persecuted the Christians, Jesus asked: "Why persecutest thou me?" So when we are embittered toward a brother or brethren, Christ makes it a personal matter regarding himself. It is an affront to him.

What danger! Bitterness does not need much nourishment nor revamping to soon appear as full-fledged hatred, and then we are up against 1 John 3:15: "Who-soever hateth his brother is a murderer and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

Love of all the brethren, no matter how unlovable they may seem to be, is what God's grace will bring about in your heart and mine. Let us, therefore, ask God to increase our love to himself and his members, *our brethren in Christ*.

found any method of obtaining the essentials of a cultured life; he still has practically nothing but his food and clothing. A few of them work for white people as longshore men, boat-hands, wood-choppers or guides, or they carve ivory trinkets or weave grass baskets. As a race, this means very little, and the Eskimo standard of living still is very low. The Christian Eskimo nevertheless is very much better off than his heathen neighbor.

The moral qualities of these people are fairly good. They are quiet and modest. Hospitality is a general virtue. They do not trust whites—and we can not blame them, but their confidence in the missionaries is unbounded. They pay their debts if they can get enough furs for that purpose. As they are very poor, begging from the "Cossack" has become a common vice. They lack self-confidence but readily assist each other in case of need. Stealing from neighbors is considered wrong and a thief is publicly reprimanded in the *kashige*. Theft from a stranger is less blameworthy. The Eskimos are not given to lying, and profanity does not exist—except in English. Their strongest word is *ominakfa* which means, "how hateful." All smoke and chew—habits they learned from the Russians. Until recently, they knew nothing about alcohol for nothing grows on the *tundra* out of which they could brew or distill intoxicating liquor.

Deeds of violence occur rarely. Formerly they exposed children, the sick, or aged parents, and the aged often committed suicide to avoid exposure. Witches were tortured to a horrible death. Sex immorality is the commonest vice and their moral standards in this respect are very low.

They have a fine sense of humor, rigidly controlled. When something funny happens in school, the children will give not the slightest sign of their feelings, but during recess they may roll in the snow and laugh aloud in glee over the funny thing that happened perhaps hours ago. A priest once spoke a great deal about "the big fire" (purgatory). One night his cabin caught fire; he tried to escape through the one small window in his attic sleeping room. Half way in and half way out, his portly rotundity jammed in the narrow aperture. His loud shouts woke the natives. They saw the fire and rushed to his assistance, shouting: "The big fire, the big fire." The natives pulled him to safety but they enjoyed the joke on the priest so much that he left that neighborhood and never returned.

The sense of personal property rights seems to be entirely lacking and they

share with the people of their village all they have. Occasionally they gather great provisions for a *pollach*—a give-away festival. People from another village are invited to spend a week with them in feasting and dancing. At the end they give the departing guests all they have—often no food even is left in the village.

They never plan for the future. When a missionary urged a woman to gather wood in summer, so that she would not have to scratch in the snow twice every day for enough wood to boil water for tea, she would not do it. She gave as her reason: White people may have some prospect of life, but Eskimos, especially women, may die any time. If she should die, her husband would at once take another wife and she would have gathered wood for the second wife! That is too much to expect of an Eskimo squaw!

### Social and Religious

The Eskimo man has little regard for womanhood. He considers himself so greatly superior, that the Christian ideal of marriage and home life seems ridiculous to him. Today there are many Christian marriages and homes.

Social life is never fully developed among nomads, yet such as there is usually has a firm hold on the people. The Eskimo's wretched dwelling is always in or near a village, even though he does not spend much time there. They love the village and its people and social life expresses itself mostly in games, feasts, dances and ceremonial observances. As may be expected, some of their practices are such that missionaries never speak or write about them.

The Eskimo music is strange. Men keep up for hours a queer, doleful, monotonous chant while traveling on the water or while the women dance in the *kashige*. Both men and women dance, but never together. Mostly it is the women who dance while the men chant and keep time by beating a tambourine, which is rudely constructed by stretching a bladder over spruce-wood frames. Most of the dances imitate the work of men and women, such as seal hunting or kayak-making. A white visitor has described their funny mimicry of the antics of a "cranky" outboard engine.

The ceremonial observances are not "religious" in our sense of the word, yet they have a meaning deeper than merely entertainment. They are designed to honor the souls of the dead and to placate the evil spirits. In a sense the Eskimos have no native religion. There is no cultus, no ritual, no meeting for purposes of worship, prayer or thanksgiving. They believe in God—*agayun*—but their idea of him is

very vague. He is the Creator—but the myth about creation is very different in different parts of the Eskimo domain. No moral qualities are attributed to God, such as holiness, justice, love and the idea of Providence does not appear. The Eskimo knows nothing of prayer for he believes himself too stupid to know anything about God. There is a God—that's all—only he does not express his agnosticism in the sesqui-pedalian phraseology of the Ph.D.

Fear takes the place of religion in the life of the Eskimo. "We do not believe, we only fear." Everything is full of spirits and all are evil, or at any rate may become enraged and seek his hurt. So he fears everything and all the time—*shamans*, witches, the forces of nature, cold, famine, sickness, death, the souls of the dead, the spirits in earth, air and water, things seen and things unseen—everything! He tries to keep the favor of the spirits by observing all the countless taboos the fathers have taught him.

His most constant fear is that of the *charaiyak*, or the spirits of his departed relatives. They live just under ground and have the power of appearing on earth. This they do for the purpose of finding a better home in the body of a living person. Unfortunately, the presence of the parasitic spirit in the body of the Eskimo means sickness and death to the host. An exception occurs, if the spirit soon after its disembodiment can enter the body of a new-born infant. In that case, the spirit can live human over again. Hence they often believe that their own child may really be their own father or mother or one of the grandparents or some other relative. One Eskimo always called his daughter "mother," because his daughter was born on the same day on which his mother died.

Their attitude towards their dead combines two apparently contradictory elements—fear and regard. They certainly fear the shades of their own dead since they might unknowingly offend them and thus turn them into bitter enemies. They never mention the name of a departed—unless it has been given to a person soon after the death of a relative. A photographer once showed moving pictures in which were some Eskimos who had died since the pictures were taken. Their appearance on the screen caused great consternation in Eskimo hearts.

They also show great respect for the memory of the dead and do not easily forget them. Almost daily they offer libations and food in their memory; without speaking a word they throw on the ground a few fragments of fish or several drops of water. At certain intervals, a series of mortuary feasts are held, ending with "the Great Feast of the Dead," sometimes called by whites, the Ten Year Feast. During the feasting and dancing, they chant, not requiems, but soul-stirring

appeals for the departed to return. "Dead ones, come here—*ala-aiya!* Seal skins for a tent you will get—*ala-aiya!* Come here, do. Reindeer skins for a bed you will get—*ala-aiya!* Come here, do." If the dead could accept the invitation to appear, it is safe to say the poor Eskimos would be driven frantic by fear.

The shaman alone can save them from the sickness caused by the evil spirits. They call him "*tun-gha-lik*," owner of a *tumhak* or spirit. In Greenland the name is *Angakok* and in Alaska also *A-nfatl-kok* or *Anetlkok*. He is a witch doctor and the world's greatest charlatan and scoundrel. He claims to have power over evil spirits by being in league with the chief of evil spirits—the devil. Through the shaman, the devil is the real ruler of the Eskimos. The shaman by strange and violent incantations, get control of a strong spirit from the underworld, who tells him what to do for the sick. Often the shaman claims he first gets that stronger spirit into his own body and then commands it to go into the patient's body to drive out the spirit that causes the sickness.

The witch doctor demands good pay. He never "makes medicine" for sweet charity's sake. The Eskimos will give a shaman anything for which he asks—fish, dogs, sled, spear, net, trap, gun, ammunition, parka, house or wife. If he should refuse, the shaman would put an evil spirit into his body and that would mean death. The Eskimo is the abject slave of the shaman.

But the Eskimo does not enjoy the slavery. There are a few cases of the natives killing a shaman, but another one takes his place, that's all. Only the Christian missionaries fight this evil power. Sometimes they win easily. During the Great War, a missionary sat in a *kashige* with the natives. A shaman told the men what he had heard about monster guns, high explosives, machine guns and poison gas. He assured them again and again that none of these things could touch him. It was too much for the missionary. He said they would try it on him—and sent for a "thirty-thirty." But before the weapon was brought in, the shaman had disappeared. But sometimes missionaries have been in danger of death because of their opposition to the shaman.

"If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," is the message of the missionaries to these mental and spiritual slaves. They preach the Gospel of Christ and rely solely upon the love of God, especially as shown in his sufferings, death and resurrection to break the power of sin in these dark hearts. They do not rely on "larger, or modern, or social or economic" methods in their efforts to win souls for the Lord Jesus. They do all the charity they can; they teach the chil-

dren; they use all the medicinal knowledge they may possess; they help the natives get the best prices they can for their furs, grass blankets and ivory trinkets. But all that does not save souls. It has its good purpose, but the mission has one great purpose and one great method—to save the souls of the Eskimos by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus the Savior.

"The power of the Gospel" has been demonstrated among these lowest people, as everywhere else by making "new creatures" of many of them. They have their organized congregations, with regular services, prayer meetings, Sunday school, church officers, with rules of conduct. Their home-life is Christian, with family prayers and Christian training of children. They partially support their churches and are already beginning to send evangelists out to their heathen brethren.—*Missionary Review*.

### Attention Visitors to A Century of Progress.

This is another reminder that our Mission Friends, who visit Chicago during the summer, are cordially invited to avail themselves of the hospitality of the Chicago Mission Friends. At the reasonable cost of \$1.00 per day for one or \$1.50 for two in a room, pleasant and comfortable rooms may be procured. The price will be somewhat less per day for prolonged stays of a week or more. In some of the homes there is room enough for a small family of 4 or 5 members. Several furnished flats are offered for the summer at reasonable figures. Garage-space can be arranged for at low costs. Those who wish to attend the annual conference in Austin but are not delegates, will be accommodated, as far as possible on the West Side. Meals will be provided at the Austin Covenant church at a nominal cost.

Send all applications for room to The Covenant Office, 1022 Belmont Ave., Chicago, Ill. A secretary has been engaged to have charge of the applications and to make the necessary arrangements. Each application should be endorsed by the local pastor or church chairman.

Committee,  
C. Adolph Nylund, Sec'y.

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