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**INTERESTING INFORMATION REGARDING THE ESKIMOS**

Some of the Unusual Customs and Habits of the Natives of the Far North. Eskimos Noted for Their Good Nature

Some months ago The Advance gave an extended review by Mr. Karl Eyre in regard to life among the Eskimos and there was very general interest in the article. The habits, customs and life of the Eskimos are of three-fold interest. There is the interest always roused because of the unusual and the novel. Then there is the interest because the Eskimos are natives of a part of Canada that is little known but that is generally realized to have great possibilities. And, thirdly, there is special interest in the present in the Eskimos because of the extended exploring and prospecting being carried on these days in their territory by Ontario and other Canadian firms. Mr. Norman C. Pearce, of The Northern Miner has paid more than one visit to the Eskimo country and has gathered much interesting information that will be read with much pleasure by readers of The Advance. The following is the article by Mr. Pearce:—

"The Eskimos must be happy-minded, because they have eliminated the Eternal Triangle," said Charles Kaeding, when I was discussing the Eskimo with him after an air trip into the Barren Lands. It was a sage observation. The Eskimo omits jealousy from his list of emotions. He is carefree and buoyantly disposed. A man may have three wives, if he can support that many, and the wives appear to be quite happy. Frequently wives are traded. A hunter must take a woman along on his hunting expeditions to mend his clothing, to do the cooking and to help him keep the komatik upright in the heavy snowdrifts. His own wife may not be well enough to go out on a three months' excursion into the Barren Lands, so he borrows a wife from his best friend, and his best friend promises to love, honour and cherish the other while he is away. Sometimes these temporary arrangements become permanent, and all are quite satisfied about it.

"No one could pretend to be an authority on the Eskimos who has only spent a couple of weeks in the sub-Arctic, but a newspaper man naturally sees and hears things which give some idea of the life of the natives.

"One thing which rather intrigued me was their practice of passing children around. Parents who have four or five children are quite glad to make the gift of an infant, sometimes of a child before birth, to a couple not blessed with children. One notices the wonderful relationship existing between parents and children. The later are very well behaved, and the older folks have the most kindly feeling toward the younger ones. A trader who has been in the country for 16 years told me that in all that time he had seen only two spankings, and both of them were rather light affairs. The Eskimos cannot build up a fortune for his old age, he depends on his children, and that is why every couple, as they advance down the years, like to surround themselves with two or three children to look after them.

"Some of the few Christianized, really Christianized Eskimos, may have marriage ceremonies, but those who have lived in the country say that there is no going to church nor house weddings to mark the big day. The young lady simply gathers up her sewing implements, her curved knife for cutting skins, and her other little household effects, and goes to the bridegroom's igloo. If, after two or three years, no children have resulted, the marriage may be dissolved. Another custom quite prevalent is the betrothal at infancy, sometimes before, of children. If, on growing up, the young man finds that the young lady who has been chosen for him is not to his liking, he may take another. Then, if he finds that other not quite suitable, he may go back and claim the first one, even though she be married to another in the meantime.

Around the trading posts, where the missionaries have "evangelized" the people, things are a little more regular, and there is not the wide exchange of wives as happens at the feast of Sedna in some of the more distant places. If the Eskimo woman does not enjoy the place that her civilized sister has, or if she feels down-trodden, she does not show it. She appears to be quite happy and gay. She knows that she is very essential in the Eskimo scheme of things. It is very true that she chews her husband's moccasins to make them soft. It is not true, though, that she wears her teeth down to the stumps doing it.

"It is considered a very grave offense in the North to give liquor to an Eskimo, and the Mounted Police are very careful to check this practice, heavy fines resulting on conviction.

"So far, the Eskimo has had very little contact with the white man, but with the sudden moving in of prospectors, mining men, and with the probable building up of mines, into the silent land which he has so long considered his own, the native will come in contact with the white man's ways and all the disadvantages of civilization, along with its, to him, dubious advantages. A native can barely withstand even a common cold, which frequently develops into influenza. Some authorities fear that the native will not be able to withstand the blow of civilization. That may be extreme. It is hoped it is extreme, for it is apparent to anyone who has spent any time in that coun-

try that exploration will never be carried very far in the sub-Arctic without the help of the native. He knows the country, is a necessary guide, he knows how to hunt in a country where white men would starve, as some have starved.

"Steffanson writing last year said that only a dozen white men in the world knew how to make a snow house. He can make the number twelve and a half now, for I have half a notion how it is done. Really, he can make the number much higher, because prospectors who have spent the winter in the country have been forced to learn what appears to be an easy trick, but which is rather difficult.

"Speaking of prospectors to one of the old-time traders in the country, the subject of the murder of white men by the Eskimo came up. Murder is so foreign to the carefree disposition of the natives, as we saw it on this flying trip, that we were led to ask about the unhappy incidents that occurred in the past. The old-timer explained that the white man had offended the personal dignity of the native. Or else had threatened it. There was one case of where a white man had whipped, and had pretended to strike Eskimos who were not hurrying their dogs along as fast as the traveller had desired. Fearing for their lives, the Eskimos had slain the man. It is quite plain that the native is a very proud man. Independent by nature, quite able to take care of himself under most trying circumstances, he has developed a dignity that is quite justified by personal accomplishment. The Dominion Explorers prospectors who have been in close contact with the natives for the months of the long sub-Arctic winter have got along with them well. By jollying them, laughing at them, with them, the natives have been brought to do anything. In his own business of hunting, the Eskimo is not to be lightly thought of. An ordinary hunter makes the equivalent of \$4,000 a year of our money, and many of them have an income that is the equivalent of \$10,000 a year. Of course, this does not mean \$10,000 in Toronto. Everything the natives buy costs them many times the manufactured cost. Gasoline, for instance, which he uses for his auxiliary schooner on the coast, or for his stove inland, runs him from one to three dollars a gallon. There is no money in that country, bills have no meaning, everything is traded.

"I mentioned in my story last week that the Eskimo was mechanically minded, and many people who read the story were quite surprised at this. It is

quite true. The native takes complicated machinery apart and reassembles it perfectly. Whether he is creatively mechanical has yet to be learned. He has not the tools or the equipment. Undoubtedly he is a genius in his own way. Deprived of wood with which to make his komatik or toboggan, the Eskimo will take strips of deer hide, twist and freeze them, and get along quite well without wood. He can build, from such flimsy materials, a flexible hunting komatik, 30 feet long, that five dogs can pull, even although it is loaded with 2,500 pounds of meat. With what little he has the native does wonders. Prospectors who have lived in the country with them say that when mines are made up in the Barren Lands the Eskimos will be the shift bosses, provided they are able to withstand the white man's diseases. That is the big point in considering the relationship of the Eskimo to the mining industry. Can he be immunized against the complaints of civilization which the white man is able to throw off, but which the natives may take severely?

"In some ways the native is very sensible. He has divided his year into thirteen lunar months. His counting system, however, becomes very complicated when it ascends into high numbers. For instance, the number 79 requires 24 words to express it. They count by the number of fingers and toes. Twenty is one man, 40 is two Eskimos. A few have been Christianized, but most of them cling to their old beliefs. They have about three score gods and goddesses, or rather spirits, in their repertoire. Around the trading post Christianity is popular perhaps because Sunday gives them a day of rest. They are hard working, but they are as strong for leisure as the white.

"The Eskimo can be fitted into the mining picture. The short experience of Dominion Explorers around Tavane, where three native families are employed for the winter, demonstrated that the native is glad to be relieved of the food and fuel worries of his ordinary life, and gives faithful service in return. In a primitive way he has been mining for generations, particularly in the Coronation Gulf country, where the Copper Eskimos, as the local tribe is called, have been "mining" the deposits or searching for float, in order to provide themselves with copper points for their weapons, or for utensils. And on one of the big Arctic islands, 800 miles north of the mouth of the Mackenzie, natives for many years, under a single white man, have been mining a coal deposit."



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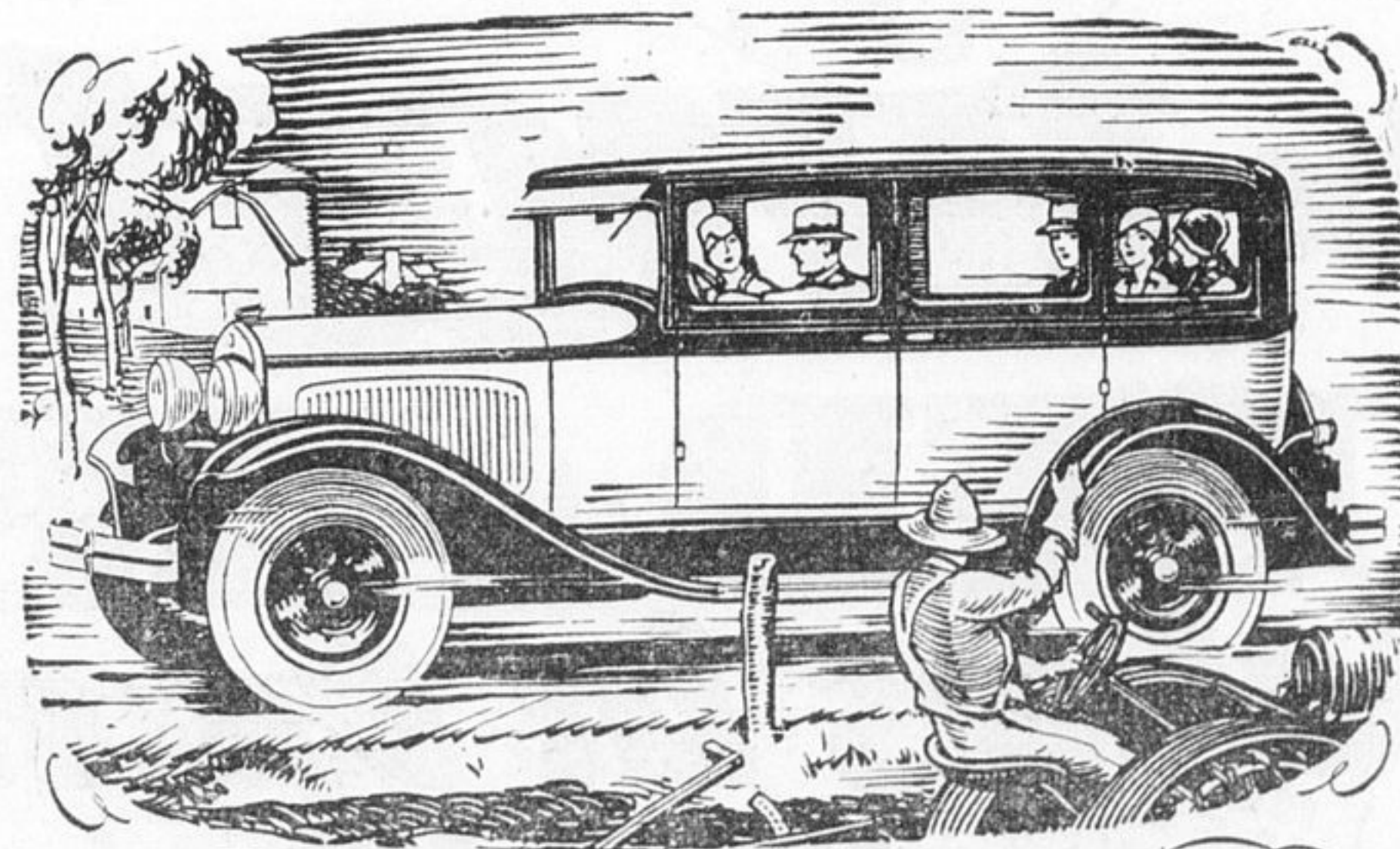
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