

# Fishhooks for Wives

Amazing Phase of White Slavery Among the Eskimos of the Far North of British America

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**—The revelations in this article are almost unbelievable and it seems incredible that in this enlightened age men, even far off Eskimos, should think of trafficking in their wives, but James Oliver Curwood, whose fame as a writer of popular stories is widely known, writes this narrative for us and with knowledge of the facts, as he was formerly a special investigator for the Canadian Government. This is another of the series of remarkable Northern sketches which Mr. Curwood has written exclusively for Leslie's Weekly.

**T**HE PURCHASE was made at Waskee's igloo, on Mackenzie Bay, through an Eskimo interpreter who could understand English. Calkins—which, for obvious reasons, is not his right name—had looked over some twenty Eskimo women and girls and had decided upon Waskee's wife, and Waskee tried hard to conceal his satisfaction. Calkins was going to winter with a whaler on the Mackenzie and he was buying a "six months' wife." During the formality of sale, Waskee's wife sat stolidly on the bearskin where her husband had placed her to show off to best advantage. She was a young woman—scarcely seventeen, I learned; a Kogmollock, with a brown, oval face, a mouth that was really pretty, and an unusual amount of straight, black hair. She was a bride of a little over a year, and this was the first time that she had been sold to a white man. Her only sign of emotion at the transaction in which she was the chief factor betrayed itself in her parted lips and the steadiness of the gaze which she fastened upon Calkins. This was the first great event in her life—her sale to a white man. She had seen scores of other girls and women sold, and one of her ambitions had been to realize that day herself. In her code of things it was a great social triumph, without sin. For more than fifty years her people had sold themselves to white men. Human barter had come to be a part of their existence, and they saw no reason in the ceaseless but futile efforts of the Canadian government to stop the traffic through the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, stationed at Herschel and at Fullerton.

The vision of the young wife, as she eyed Calkins, was something like this: As the white man's wife, she would be dressed gayly through all the long winter, have plenty to eat and little work to do. As Waskee's wife, she would go cold, starve at intervals, perhaps die of hardship before spring. Therefore she prayed in her heathen way to become the wife of Calkins. And Waskee saw another picture: If Calkins paid the price he asked, he would live like a prince through the winter, smoke as much as he pleased and grow fat instead of thin. His price was ten sacks of flour and a good tobacco supply. For this he agreed to give up his igloo and build another for himself. In addition to the flour and tobacco, he demanded ten fishhooks.

"I'll give you eight sacks of flour and the fishhooks," Calkins told him, through the interpreter.

Waskee shook his head. Calkins was new at the game, and the Eskimo husband knew it. He would have sold his wife at Calkins's offer quickly enough if he had thought that the white man would not come to his terms. But his wife was the finest looking woman in the village, and he hung to his price. At last Calkins agreed to pay, and for the first time a quick light of pleasure leaped into the Eskimo girl's dark eyes. She did not glance at her husband as he rose and prepared to leave the igloo, and Waskee took as little notice of her as though she had been a dumb animal. Within five minutes Waskee had left the igloo for the winter.

majority of girl babies to die, keeping the population down to just about half and half. Since twenty-five years ago, however, the girl baby has been considered more valuable than the male, and they were allowed to live.

This is the one reason why there are two or three girls and women to every man in the average Eskimo village of to-day. On my last trip into the north, I secured a census of the natives living at Herschel Island. There were a total of fifty-five. Of these there were fourteen male adults and six boys—twenty males in all. There were, on the other hand, twenty-six women and nine girls—a total of thirty-five.

South of Victoria Island there are the remains of a village which at one time must have numbered several hundred people. There are evidences of about eighty igloos, and many of the frames are still standing. They are built entirely of whale ribs and heaps of whale bones, and must have been constructed thirty or forty years ago, when whales were so common that the natives seldom experienced the pangs of starvation. I figure that at that time there were three hundred people in the village. Since that time this village has moved far to the east and numbers not more than eighty. Of these only about thirty are males. I met one old Eskimo who, through an interpreter, told me a little of the days when three fishhooks bought a wife of him. At that time the fishhook was about the most wonderful thing that had come into the lives of the Eskimo, and even to-day a "sale" or a "rental" of a wife or daughter is very seldom made without a certain percentage of payment in fishhooks.

In the village east of Victoria Island I found that nearly every adult woman and many of the young girls had at one time or another been white men's property. A number of the women had been taken repeatedly for years back by the same sailors, as is the case in nearly every Eskimo village. It is a curious fact that, while the women do not have to be urged to leave their native husbands for an alien partner, they are strangely faithful to their white purchasers after they have once become their property. The highest honor an Eskimo woman or girl can achieve is to become a "steady wife"; that is, a sailor takes her with the understanding that he is to have her year after year, or as often as his ship comes near her village, the same price being paid each year to her husband or father. If it should happen that he misses a season, he must, in order to hold his purchase, send in the stipulated price by some other ship. In this event neither the Eskimo woman nor her husband will listen to the advances of any other man, even though the "steady man" remains away for several years. As long as his supplies appear, he is certain of fidelity.

I have before me a letter, written by Inspector G. L. Jennings, commanding the Mackenzie River district of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. He says, in part:

Sailors coming here repeatedly take the same woman. Years that they do not come outfits are sent in by them. This relationship

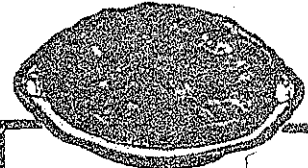
women are bringing into the world a weaker race, and one that cannot exist like the race of old amid the rigors of the Arctic winter. The large majority of these half-white children are sent to the government schools in Alaska, and about twenty of them are now in school in San Francisco and other American cities.

Even the Bishop of Yukon admits that the moral side of the native question is one of the most perplexing that faces the authorities to-day, both spiritual and physical, and that whatever change is brought about must be a gradual and tactful one. Personally I can see but one solution, in spite of this eminent authority's opinion. I believe that the problem should be solved, not with the Eskimo, but with the white man, by an amendment to the Indian act, making it an indictable offense for any white man to live in any kind of conjugal relationship with an Eskimo woman unless legally married. If this were done, the government would have to take upon itself the responsibility of doing what the whalers do now—supply the natives with flour, tea, clothes, tobacco and other things which have become necessary to their existence. If the problem is allowed to work itself out, there will be but few natives left to profit in the end. Twenty years ago there were four hundred Eskimos at Kittigazuit. There are now less than fifty. Twenty years ago there were seven hundred in the Mackenzie delta. To-day there are only two hundred and sixty from the Alaska border to Baillie Island. The figures tell the story.

## A Restaurant Woman's Sermon.

**A** WOMAN who evidently has been in a position to observe things for herself and has formed positive opinions writes to LESLIE'S as follows: "Having employed from ten to twenty girls and young men for years, the problem of fallen women has always confronted me. This is my line of reasoning: A man seems to consider a waitress his natural prey. If she is new at serving the public, she repels his advances with shamed face and hot tears; if married and respectable, she repels him angrily and with no hiding of her disgust; but if rather tired, dispirited and not new to the persistent attentions of men, young, middle-aged, old and bald—heaven help her!—she struggles no more. I cannot yet see a girl I consider willfully immoral. Any normal woman likes, even craves, the attention of a man, and it seems so many girls must be destroyed and cast aside before a young man is ready to say to a good girl, 'I love you and I want you to marry me.' She must be good, though he may have wallowed through years of filth.

"A bachelor of forty, who called himself a man of the world, said to me, 'I'd like to marry and settle down, but I know so much about women, I'm afraid to trust one enough to marry her.' My answer flashed, 'What are you?' But he didn't appear to consider that side of the question. Then there is the



### Dutch Apple Cake

One traveling in Europe sees much of the Dutch Apple Cake. It is fruity, easily digested, and altogether a wholesome dish. The crust is important. To get it crisp, creamy, and fine flavor, use

### BORDEN'S EAGLE BRAND CONDENSED MILK

**RECIPE:**—Mix together two cups sifted flour, half a teaspoonful salt, one generous teaspoonful baking powder; rub into this one heaping tablespoonful butter, beat one egg, and to it four tablespoons Eagle Brand Condensed Milk, diluted with three-fourths cup water, and stir this into the dry mixture. Beat well and spread the dough half an inch thick in a shallow baking pan. Pare six apples, cut into eighths, lay them snug edges down, in parallel rows on top of the dough, pressing them in slightly. Sprinkle one-third of a cup of sugar over the apples, and bake in a hot oven about half an hour.



Write for Borden's Recipe Book

**BORDEN'S CONDENSED MILK CO.**  
"Leaders of Quality"  
Est. 1857 New York

## Uncle Sam's Farm-boy School.

(Continued from page 230.)

system and discontinue our enslavement to cotton. Of course we must and we will continue to produce the world's greatest cotton crop, but along with this cotton we must produce more actual food for man and beast."

This is one of the features of the South's fight to reduce the high cost of living. That it is an effective one is apparent on the surface and to the most casual observer.

With the boys obtaining real results from their corn and cotton, the girls are not forgotten. The girls' tomato club follows in the wake of the boys' corn club—the co-eds of Uncle Sam's school—and the Department of Agriculture shows itself no discriminator against the fairer sex in its campaign of education. With tomato growing goes tomato canning, and the results are of great value to the girls now and when they become the mistresses of their own farm-houses.

The department is not alone responsible for all this, however. The best indication of enlightenment in any community is when its business men begin to realize that nothing benefits them individually so much as the uniform and equitable development of the community in which they live. Southern business men generally are turning to this status-manship of economic development and the corn clubs and the tomato clubs have been part of the results.

## Hard To See

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## The BUSINESS

WILLIAM... A... greatest... world a... the greatest... world. They u... ica the wealth... are employin... which excites... world. Some... Rockefeller, an... for the advanc... porting institut... gical experime... own people and... of our business... endowing libr... tion of univers... taining observ... tific establishm... scientific resear... like Morgan, a... world, for the... and perception... ture of our peop... intellectual enj...

WANTS

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That in any part of the world life should come to that point where immorality, as we know it, should actually mean existence is a condition which it is difficult for one to picture. Yet this condition exists, and has existed for many years, along the entire length of the Arctic coast, and especially among the Kogmollocks. Because of this traffic between the whalers and the natives, the government established its Arctic outposts of the Royal Mounted; and at Herschel, on the Polar Sea, half a dozen crude wooden crosses mark the graves of those who have worked vainly to destroy a custom which will go only with the passing of a race which is already traveling rapidly toward extinction.

White men must be held accountable for the degradation and passing of the Eskimo even to a greater degree than in the case of the Indian. When the first whalers went into the Arctic, the Eskimo was a meat eater, and nature made him thrive on the diet. His garden was the open sea and the great ice fields; his only food the polar bear, the whale, the seal and fish. But the white man's ships quickly changed this. They brought him flour, sugar, dried fruits, canned stuffs, tobacco and liquors, and the Eskimo's dietetic system underwent a change, so that in the course of a generation these things became necessities to him. As the polar bear and the whale disappeared, they became still greater necessities, until at last the failure of a whaler to winter near a village meant starvation. For a time the Eskimo paid for these things in furs; but as furs grew more and more scarce, and whalers more and more numerous, he had to find other ways of payment. His basic idea of morality was almost nil, so it was not difficult to influence him to part with his women. The change brought about at least one good effect. On an average, about three out of every four Eskimo children born are girls, and until the white men came and placed a value on the female, the mothers allowed the

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I have before me a letter, written by Inspector G. L. Jennings, commanding the Mackenzie River district of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. He says, in part:

Sailors coming here repeatedly take the same woman. Years that they do not come outfits are sent in by them. This relationship between the sailors and the natives is now a matter of existence. No longer can the Eskimo do without tea, tobacco and breadstuffs. Without the latter children die. Since their association with the white men the natives here have never lived or dressed so well. Also they have learned much of the white man's ways, his language, writing, cleanliness, cooking, housekeeping, etc. Most of the igloos are very clean, although sometimes the odor from seal and rotten fish is rather strong. Every family has a bath at least once a week and every Sunday appear in clean clothes. They take plenty of exercise and are very fond of football. They have no marriage ceremony, the consent of the bride's father being alone sufficient. Now that they have learned our marriage laws the men have expressed themselves as strongly against it, fearing that their wives will not be allowed to take sailors. Last summer four native couples were legally married at this point. Later when they found that a ship would winter here and that, under our law, their wives could not take men for the winter, the Eskimo husbands came in a body and made the following complaint: "Minister, he like me get married; now he got to give me grub." The point in question was one beyond their comprehension.

In spite of Inspector Jennings's assertion that the white men have had several beneficial effects upon the native population of his district, it cannot be denied that, since these relationships with white men began, the Eskimos have died off at an alarming rate. Thirty years ago there were probably five thousand Eskimos between the Mackenzie and the eastern end of Victoria Island. It is doubtful if there are now much more than a quarter of that number. They are cleaner and a trifle more "civilized," it is true; but the men are no longer the daring little kayak hunters of long ago, when single-handed they ventured forth to attack the polar bear on his ice floe. Civilized man's "necessities," purchased through their women, have weakened them. I once made the acquaintance of an Eskimo village of twenty people. Two years later there were only eleven, of those twenty left alive. They had fallen sick and died during the winter, not because of a scarcity of meat, but because they had no flour. Scores of children are born with white blood in their veins, and thus the

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"A bachelor of forty, who called himself a man of the world, said to me, 'I'd like to marry and settle down, but I know so much about women, I'm afraid to trust one enough to marry her.' My answer flashed, 'What are you?' But he didn't appear to consider that side of the question. Then there is the married man, who expects his wife to behave; but he uses my telephone to tell her he is too busy to come home to dine, and is not abashed that I see the woman waiting at the table for him to order a fancy dinner. Or, if he comes in alone, he has no end of time to start up a flirtation with some girl. But the old boy, sane eyes, sans teeth, sans hair, fat, ugly, but visibly prosperous, to quote the girls' slang, 'He sure is the limit!' So old in vice, he does not care who sees him as he is!

"When I was eighteen, I went to an old lawyer, an honored soldier, a congressman, a Mason, an Odd Fellow and carrying a good section of the alphabet at the end of his name. I needed legal advice and he represented to my mind a father. His attentions to me were such that I fled in dismay. He wasn't fatherly. But, oh, the poor girls that can't always flee!

"In one city a woman sued a prominent man for support. He had a legal wife. This woman claimed to have been a common-law wife. The man admitted a liaison, but said the woman was trying to force money out of him because of it, and there were others (no doubt on both sides). The judge denied her claim, and sternly ordered the woman to cease annoying said prominent man. She took her child's hand and they went away. I am not a suffragette, but surely if women had some part in making and interpreting the laws they would deal more justly with fallen women.

"In an article published in LESLIE's, the injustice of woman to woman is deplored. This is useless. A pure woman cannot make a social equal of a woman of the atroc. But I know my sex, and I affirm that a good woman will take care of that fallen sister and will deal as fairly by her as men deal by fallen men. She will give her justice, and it will be no parody.

"Men who are true, let the girl question alone and start after the boys. They will listen to you when

(Continued on page 340.)

cotton we must produce more actual

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## Hard To See

EVEN WHEN THE FACTS ABOUT COFFEE ARE PLAIN.

It is curious how people will refuse to believe what one can clearly see.

Tell the average man or woman that the slow but cumulative poisonous effect of caffeine—the alkaloid in tea and coffee—tends to weaken the heart, upsets the nervous system and cause indigestion, and they may laugh at you if you don't know the facts.

Prove it by science or by practical demonstration in the recovery of coffee drinkers from the above conditions, and a large per cent of the human family will shrug their shoulders, take a few drugs and—keep on drinking coffee tea.

"Coffee never agreed with me with several members of our household writes a lady. "It enervates, depresses and creates a feeling of languor and heaviness. It was only by leaving coffee and using Postum that we discovered the cause and way out of these conditions."

"The only reason, I am sure, Postum is not used altogether to the exclusion of ordinary coffee is, no persons do not know and do not care willing to learn the facts and how to prepare this nutritious beverage. There's only one way—according to directions—boil it fully 15 minutes. Then it is delicious." Name given Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich. See the little book, "The Road to Wellbeing in packages." "There's a reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, full of human interest.