

The Assistant Pastor

SAUDE AND JERICO, IA., APRIL, 1928.

ANOTHER BREEZE FROM ALASKA

The Board had urged me to visit the Eskimo village at Shismaref. Shismaref is several days' journey up the Arctic coast from the mission station at Teller. Being my first winter in the country, I had, as yet, no dog team. I was on the lookout for some way of making the journey, and when I heard that a trader of Nome contemplated a trip up through that country I secured passage with him.

I must make you acquainted with my driver, guide and interpreter. Frederick Larson was confirmed in the Lutheran Church in Lapland, Norway. At the age of fifteen he came as one of the little colony of Laplanders which was brought to Alaska by our Government in the year 1894 to serve as teachers to the Eskimos in the care of reindeer. When I met him he was nearing middle age, was the husband of an Eskimo woman, and the father of several children. He spoke English, Norwegian, Lappish and Eskimo with about equal readiness. In dress and habits he was all Eskimo. He was a friendly, jovial sort of a fellow but a huge liar. Not the dangerous deceiving kind, but the sincere, harmless and very common type that exaggerate their statements two to three hundred per cent, deceiving few but themselves.

We arranged to leave the Mission the forepart of the week on a certain date in March. He did not show up till Friday morning of the designated week. My heart fell when I saw his outfit. He had a heavy load of trading goods; rifles, steel traps, ammunition, calicoes, ducking, etc., etc. His dogs were a miscellaneous and sundry collection of bad and indifferent mongrel curs. When I had my sleeping bag, lunch kit, and other necessary luggage lashed on top of the already big load, the sled looked like a moving van. To sit astride of this was the only available accommodation for the passenger.

At one o'clock in the afternoon of the same day the dogs were all in their traces, everything was in its place, including the passenger, and the doughty driver in stentorian voice gave the command "mush." The van moved. Yes, it moved, but it took so long to get beyond hailing of home that the sayings of good-byes and waving of adieus became a test of physical endurance.

That night we found shelter in a prospector's deserted shack at the mouth of Lost River. The following evening we reached the large Eskimo village at Cape Prince of Wales. Here is a Congregational mission and a Government school. I found a warm welcome at the home of the teacher. He was a Methodist. Good morals stuck out all over him, but he denied the divinity of Jesus our Savior. I expressed surprise that he would call himself a Methodist who denied one of the fundamentals of the

Christian religion, stating that Methodists do not make such denial. He declared that many do.

The next day being Sunday, Mr. Larson suggested that we observe the day by not traveling and thus also give the dogs needed rest. He made the suggestion with such pious mein and sanctimonious countenance that I did not have the heart to intimate that he would, incidentally, have opportunity to do a little trading. It was also my desire to remain over Sunday at the village.

I attended morning services at the mission. Over a hundred Eskimos were present. The service opened with the singing of several hymns. The Medical Missionary then read very poorly a Scripture passage, stopping at intervals to give the interpreter a chance to translate into Eskimo the portion read. How that young Eskimo could, without hesitating or pausing, translate two or three verses at a time passes my understanding. I fear the worst, that he miserably maltreated the precious Word of God. The Scripture reading, such as it was, ended, the M. D. Missionary turned to me and requested me to speak. I declined. He insisted. I refused. Still he persisted. I told him it was unkind of him not to respect my definite answers to his invitations. He then asked the teacher to speak and he readily consented. He gave a good enough moral talk. Then some more hymns were sung. I was again asked if I wished to make a few remarks. My heart went out to the poor benighted who sat there receiving stones for bread, and I answered that if it was desired I would conduct the evening services. "Very glad, indeed, to have you do so." The announcement was forthwith made. With the singing of the doxology the so-called services closed. I need not tell you that I preached Jesus Christ the crucified and resurrected Savior of sinners at the evening service.

The next day Mr. Larson told me that it was pretty cold and stormy and that we had better see how the day would turn out before we started, especially so seeing I was a Cheechalker—tenderfoot. I would likely have thanked him for his kind concern for me had I not remembered his trading stock. We started in the afternoon with a considerably lighter load and reached a lone family about fifteen miles up the coast before dusk.

Lone, indeed. But for the cache, where the skin boats were placed for the winter out of reach of the dogs and a stove pipe, apparently, stuck into a mound of snow, there was nothing to arrest the eye as far as our vision could reach. Yet, here was a human habitation. A husband wife with their son and grandmother called this home. We entered by descending a ladder into an outer domelike chamber. From there we followed a perfectly dark passage way,—tuksuk—about four feet high, three feet wide

THE ASSISTANT PASTOR

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H. M. Tjernagel, Pastor.

CHURCH DIRECTORY

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Saude

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Ladies' Aid: Mrs. Tom Thompson, president; Mrs. Oscar Vigdal, secretary; Mrs. S. S. Robertson, treasurer.

CHURCH SERVICES

Saude—Second and fourth Sundays, 10:45 a. m.; Saturday school every Saturday, 10 a. m.; confirmation class, 9:30 a. m. Fridays.

Jerico—First and third Sundays, 10:45 a. m.; Saturday school 2 p. m.; confirmation class, 2 p. m. Fridays.

Fifth Sundays by special announcement.

ADIS GRACE, a child of Jeff O. Knutson and wife Cora, nee Vaala, born Jan. 31st, '28, was baptized March 4th in the Jerico Church. Mr. and Mrs. Ole J. Knutson, Orin and Viola Vaala, sponsors.

LORINE JEANETTE, the fourth daughter of Severt Johnson and wife Martha, nee Kimball, born Feb. 12, '28, was baptized at the parents' home in New Hampton March 18. Sponsors: Mr. and Mrs. Ole J. Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Ole O. Anderson, Jr.

HANS HOFFLAND died at his home near Saude March 20 and was buried Saturday the 24th. Mr. Hoffland came to this country from Norway, an 18-year-old boy, in 1876, and has made his home in this community most of the time since. In 1883 he married a native daughter of Saude, Johanna Halvorson, who is now alone in the old home with one unmarried son, Alfred. Three other sons have their own homes. All were present at the funeral. Although the seating capacity of the church is 500, it was all too small to hold the many friends who came to grieve with the sorrowing.

Mr. Hoffland was for many years an active and valuable member of the church and of the church choir. He served many terms as secretary of the congregation.

On the following Monday, the 26th, we gathered at the church again to commit a young man to the grave. DORIUS HANSON died at the Cresco Hospital following an operation for appendicitis, on Fri-

day the 23rd of March. Dorius was born Aug. 20, 1909, and was baptized and confirmed in the Saude Church. In spite of inclement weather and almost impassable roads, the sympathetic friends who came to share the grief of the sorrowing parents and two sisters, filled the church.

Grandfather Leifson handed the pastor a ten-dollar bill for missions instead of placing a floral wreath on the casket.

and twelve feet long, which brought us to a square opening about thirty by thirty inches. Over this hung a skin. My guide unhesitatingly entered the opening on all fours. I followed in his wake. This brought us into the main room and face to face with our hosts, who welcomed us as heartily as if we had been dear friends long expected. But there was no exit for the multifarious and pungent odors.

Be that as it may, I was hungry and I went out and brought in my lunch kit and had my supper. "How could you eat in such a place!" you exclaim. If you want a steel lined stomach with appetite to match, go to Alaska and "mush"—travel—in thirty or sixty below.

While I was yet eating my supper, grandma, who had been out fishing through a small hole in the ice, came in. She deposited her catch of tom-cod, all frozen hard, on the floor. A bowl of seal oil was placed near it. The members of the household and Mr. Larson, squatted in a circle about the frozen fish and oil bowl. I was astonished when I realized that the fish just brought in was to be their supper without any further preparation and, possibly, still more surprised when all bowed their heads while mother said grace.

The repast ended, a couple of dogs who had the freedom of the house, cleaned up the leavings; the oil bowl was placed on a shelf and the family was ready to enjoy the evening. To my question if they wished to have me tell them about God all answered "yes." By the help of Mr. Larson as interpreter, I spoke of them of sin and grace and told Bible stories from the Old and New Testaments. They showed keen interest from the first to the last word. When I ceased I was surprised to find that I had talked for fully two hours. It is easy and a pleasure to speak to interested listeners. I was disturbed slightly by grandma a few times when she captured and beheaded some annoying graybacks.

To retire for the night was a simple matter easily arranged; each lay down where before he had sat. Mother offered a somewhat lengthy prayer in an audible mumble after retiring. How I wished I could have understood it! Mr. Larson told me the next morning that she had among other things thanked God for the guests He had sent them and prayed Him to prosper them on their way.

I had expected this isolated family to be in utter ignorance of Bible truths. When I learned that they had some knowledge and were sincerely seeking more, I naturally inquired into how this had come about. I found that it was from Christian Eskimos who chanced to stop over night with them on trips up and down the coast that they had learned something of their Savior. They had heard these prayers and so they, too, now tried to pray. What a splendid commentary on the words: "Ye are the light of the world."

I admit I was glad to be off the next morning; the stench and the filth was all but getting the best of me. And, if the truth must be told, I had the impious wish that I should not have to lodge there on the return trip. Our journey up coast that day was uneventful. An occasional white fox showed us how pretty and graceful he can be in his native element and surroundings, otherwise we were alone under the vast dome. The monotony of the snow covered ice on the one hand and the white tundra on the other was broken only by a glimpse, now and then, of Ear mountain.

Towards evening we arrived at Topkok, where three Eskimo families reside. We spent a very pleasant evening and night in a relatively clean home. Here, too, the message of Good Tidings was listened to with rapt attention.

The following evening found us at the entrance to a home long deserted and now used only by a chance traveler who is hard pressed for shelter. To enter a place on all fours would seem humiliating enough, but we realized that we must become even more abject to enter here. Rather than face King Winter in the open we flopped down and wriggled in. Inside we could stand only in a stooping posture. The only way we could retain a semblance of dignity was to sit down on the earth floor. We did so and leisurely surveyed our accommodations. We found that we were in an eight by ten-hole in the ground. Light was admitted through the obstructed entrance by which we had just come. When our eyes became accustomed to the darkness, we espied a hunk of seal blubber and a simple contrivance in which Eskimos burn seal oil for purposes of light and heat. Soon we had a flickering flame dancing before us. Our troubles and slight dejection vanished forthwith, and we sang: "Ja vi elsker dette landet" as lustily as you please. Our next concern was to melt snow that we might have water to drink and have coffee made. The preparations for supper lasted more than two hours, so one may know we had an elaborate spread. We ate heartily. If cheerfulness is an aid to digestion, we most surely digested what we ate, even though some it was sun-dried salmon that we carried as dog feed. After supper stories from Lapland, Iowa, Puget Sound, where one or the other formerly had fared, alternated till the sandman came and bade us leave our hole in the ground and enter the land of Nod. Our carefree sojourn there was very refreshing and we resumed our "mushing" in "The land of lurid Northlight" with renewed vigor the next morning.

Evening found us at our destination. Shismaref is a village of about 150 Eskimos. The modest government school house towered above the Eskimo hovels like a Woolworth building. I was welcomed as guest by the teacher and his amiable wife and infant son, Woodrow Wilson. All three were Eskimos. The wife was a neat housekeeper and acceptable cook. A number of the residents of this village had formerly been nearer Teller and had been instructed and baptized at our mission there.

We stayed at the village five days. We gathered at the school house for worship every evening. The entire population, I dare say, turned out. All were interested listeners. Many desired baptism. Among these were a number of children whose parents had been baptized, as above stated, at Teller. Adults

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who desired baptism were examined. Some of them possessed sufficient knowledge to be baptized, others not. The last evening of my stay I baptized twenty-three. The adults baptized had gained the knowledge they possessed through conversation with Christian neighbors and friends. What a miracle of spiritual awakening and marvel of growth would not be experienced if the Christians of our congregations were as faithful in telling others the Glad Tidings as their fur-clad fellow redeemed.

During the day time I visited the various homes. In one I found two wives presiding. Each had her quarters, children and work in her corner of the somewhat roomy house. The husband was as attentive to one as to the other, apparently. Harmony seemed to reign, yet I felt sick at heart in heart. Polygamy has never been common among the Eskimos. Although their traditions allowed a man as many wives as he could decently support, not many undertook more than one; few exceeded two. The village was short on food. The Fall run of herring had been small and the winter seal hunting poor. They anxiously awaited Spring with its almost certain harvest of seal and walrus. One family admitted being reduced to old seal and walrus lashings as their food supply. While I was in their home such a mess was boiling. It looked like a kettle full of macaroni, but tough as any other raw-hide.

Not unwillingly I set out on the return trip, intending to hurry home as fast as possible. Did I say hurry? Yes, I sat on the slowly moving sled hurrying. My hurrying was very fatiguing and did not get us ahead much beyond snail's pace. Therefore, I emphatically said, "Forget it" and started to whistle. I whistled till my whole face was tired and then I sang all the songs I knew. I even recited poetry. Thus the tedium of the day was whiled away and sweet tempered we crawled back into the hole in the ground that we had left about week before.

The third after leaving Shismaref we were overtaken by a storm. It was not long till Mr. Larson became taciturn. I knew enough not to ask any questions. I knew, too, that he was not sure of his directions. For several hours we moved along not knowing which way we were headed. The increasing storm, the growing, though still tacit, perplexity of the guide and the oncoming night were not pleasant contemplations. The voice of the storm had not been interrupted by sound from man or beast for a long time when, suddenly, Buff, the biggest and most useless dog in the bunch, gave a short bark and simultaneously tugged at his traces fit to pull the whole load. The balance of the pack took the cue, the leader veered off to the left, and the onery beasts were off on the run for the first and only time on the whole trip. A moment or two later we heard the answering bark of dogs. We saw nothing on account of the blinding snow storm, till we drew up almost on top of the snow mound that sheltered the lone family. Fortunately my wish that we might escape the necessity of stopping at this place on our return trip was not fulfilled.

The Lord often manifests His goodness to us by not gratifying our desires.

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