

HOBBOES IN THE ARCTIC

Strange Freaks of Destiny Found on the Shores of Bering Sea

By WINTHROP PACKARD

IT is a strange place to find tramps, the bitter, inhospitable, berg-battered beaches of the ultimate North—or perhaps it is better to say the penultimate North, for the region between Bering Straits and Point Barrow, if not the jumping-off place, surely is next to it. This is the region which the explorer visits only after careful and expensive preparation, and from which we rescue him with another expedition, equally well-planned and expensive, the next year or the year after.

To round a point of rock in the frozen fastnesses of this almost unbroken North and find a hobo serenely boiling his dinner in a tomato can is enough to give a shock to any well-regulated scientist, yet this is just what is most likely to happen.

The hobo is like the rheumatism: he comes and goes, and is apt to give you a twinge when you least expect him. His ways are devious and unknown to the average man who has a local habitation and a bank-account. He appears at the side door and asks humbly for alms, sits by the wayside and eats his cold "hand-out" with the royal appetite of one who lives in the open and is at peace with the world and all mankind, and by and by he is the vanishing point in the far perspective of the railroad tracks.

We know in a vague way that he reaps where he has not sown, and is gathered into barns. Those of us who have studied him a bit realize that he does not tramp from town to town as he fain would have us believe, in his eager attempts not to find work, but travels in state, curled up on the trucks of the Pullman, astride the freight bumper, or in the dim light of the empty box-car. Yet it is strictly as a man of the comfortable zone that we think of him, and we should no more expect to find him in the far North than we should a humming-bird, or a golden-winged butterfly, or any other pampered favorite of the sun. Yet to the far North he goes, and indeed has been found there of late in increasing numbers.

The pioneers, no doubt, were men who deserted from whaling vessels, men with the tramp instinct who had been impressed on whalers when drunk, or had shipped with the idea that whaling was an easy life, and then, finding their mistake, or impelled by the instinct which makes their sort blindly seek to move on, have deserted. Recruits since have come to the fraternity from the weak-willed and the lazy who in the latter-day rushes have managed to get to the mining-camps of the extreme Northwest. At any rate, there they are, and there they make themselves at home, subsisting, as in fairer climes, through the lenient good nature of their fellow-men.

Men of the whaling-stations who spend many years at Point Hope and Point Barrow, and who also know Eastern Siberia through exploration and the purchase of reindeer and furs there, tell many interesting stories of the antics of the tramp fraternity in these regions. It would seem that the tramp, resourceful as he is, would not be able to live through the long Arctic winter if it was not for the sagacity of the Eskimos. They, like the esoteric Buddhists and some other people, look beyond the plain, matter-of-fact, every-day things of this life for the explanation of what they cannot understand.

The Eskimo no more can fathom the queer antics of the tramp than he can those of the idiots of his own race, and he classes the two together. No one, he argues, would start out on a journey without outfit, tramping north into the frozen wilderness, if he was in his right mind. Therefore, he gravely asserts that the tramp is *kukowillow* (crazy), and entitled to the immunity and protection that he grants to crazy people. The lunatic, he avers, lives bodily in this world; but his mind is in the world of spirits and is directed by them, hence the *kukowillow* must not be interfered with.

So the Arctic tramp may dwell with the tribes in their igloos, acquire wives, and feast literally on the

fat of Eskimo-land without the lifting of his hand in labor. He may travel up and down the coast or across the straits to Siberia in the umiaks without touching a paddle; and in general leads a life of most delicious irresponsibility.

One Eskimo village is an exception to this rule, and that is Point Hope. Point Hope has had missionaries for several years, and the Eskimo mind in some way has got the idea that everybody ought to work, especially the other fellow. Therefore Point Hope is the Arctic tramp's purgatory, if not a

tundra as the yellow poppies do in the summer, and to have about as much knowledge of what they were going to do. Like the poppies, they put up a smiling petition to the world about them for a living, and like the poppies they got it. Among these later-comers was "Emily the Orca man." As the shrewd might guess from this appellation, Emily was a woman, though the whaling Captain who shipped her at San Francisco had not guessed it, or had not cared. She went up on the Orca, hence her name.

Emily grew weary of the routine of a whaler, and deserted at the first point in the Arctic where the ship touched, and took refuge among the Eskimos. When the whaling-stations were established Emily divided her attention between them and the friendly Eskimos, sometimes captured and carried into slavery by the outlaw highbinders, again taking refuge at the station, and sometimes living by herself in her own igloo. When the ice-whaling began in the spring, and the villagers and the station people alike took sleds and boats, and

went out eight or ten miles across the fast shore-ice to the open leads where the whales run, Emily went with them. She built a snow hut on a point of ice that gave a good view of the whaling, and there lived contentedly. When hungry she would go to one boat or another for food, and never was sent away empty. When the thaw came she went ashore with the others, and resumed her nomadic life up and down the beach. A whaling vessel finally took her aboard, and she thus went back to civilization; but not before she had caused intense consternation

among the whaling fleet, and a joke upon Captain Healy of the United States cutter Bear.

The Arctic tramp's ideas of geography are as queer as the rest of him, and his destination, as he states it, often is a startling one. They used to come and ask to be directed to the next cattle ranch, just as if they expected to find one among the icebergs. One at Point Barrow calmly announced that he was going to Sitka by way of Bering Straits.

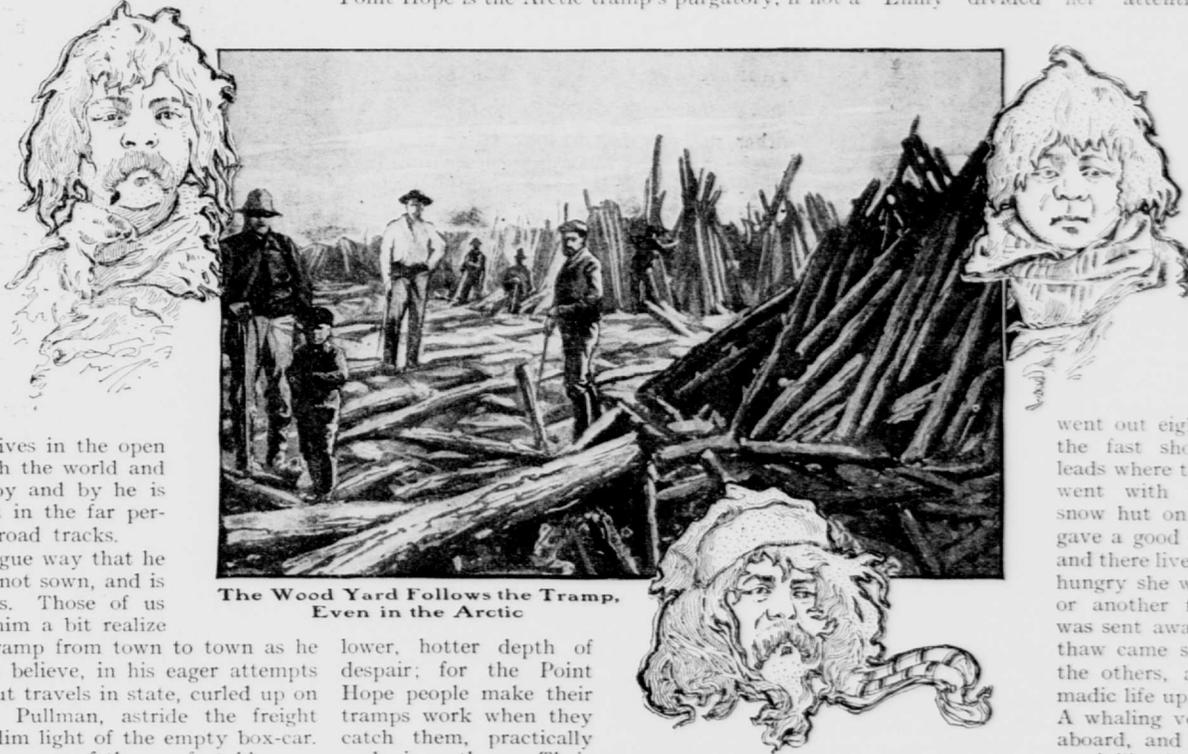
"You can't do that," he was told. "There are impassable rivers, marshes and mountains, and besides Sitka is on an island."

But he refused to be convinced, and started jauntily southward on his impossible journey. Another declared that he was going to Honolulu by way of Kamchatka, and the last seen of him he was headed in that direction.

The life of a tramp on the Siberian side by no means is so easy. True, the Chow Chuen of Eastern Siberia, like the Eskimos of Alaska, are firmly convinced that the tramp is *kukowillow*, and thus exempt from ordinary oppression, such as immediately would be perpetrated on the weak but sane; for the Chow Chuen are naturally vicious. Their usual plan seems to be to kill an unarmed man on suspicion first, and then inquire into his spiritual condition at their leisure afterward. If a gun is not handy a spear will do.

Thus in 1897 the four tramps that were on the Siberian side found the roads of "Lazy-land" anything but pleasant traveling. Of these four one was drowned, two were taken away by whaling ships; but the fourth, who was known as Hungry Harry, did not care for whaling ships—he just had escaped from one, the Balena, at Port Clarence. He crossed Bering Straits in a native boat, but left these friends at East Cape. Hungry Harry was well-named, and he began on the Chow Chuen village to East Cape with cheerful audacity, going from *topek* to *topek*, asking for food. Not satisfied with one round of the village, he started on a second, or else not realizing that he had made the full circuit he continued.

But the second time aroused the ire of the householders, who promptly set out to spear him. He escaped through agility and the interference of other



The Wood Yard Follows the Tramp, Even in the Arctic

Types of Northern Natives

lower, hotter depth of despair; for the Point Hope people make their tramps work when they catch them, practically enslaving them. Their first prize was a negro cook, a deserter, and in him they took much delight. They made him drag seals from the ice, carry wood for the fires, cook, and do menial work about the igloos. Now and then, too, they would catch him and rub his face hard to see if the color would not come off. They had seen negroes before aboard the whalers, but never yet had had a chance to see if the color was permanent, and the experiment was a source of perennial joy to them.

Another who came later found his life a harder one still, for they determined to make an acrobat of him, lowering him from Lisburne Heights five hundred feet on a seal-hide rope to gather puffin eggs. The Lisburne rocks are jagged, and the ups and downs of life were many—too many for poor Sambo, who finally died, a mass of bruises, and with far more raw hide on him than that by which he was lowered. Thus unfortunate were the members of the tramp fraternity who went to Point Hope "in search of work"—and found it.

Other tribes and the whaling-station men were kinder. "When I went to take charge of the Point Barrow whaling-station," says Kelley, "I found the residence full of tramps, and the former agent living in the powder-magazine. On entering the building, I was met at the door of a room by a man who said: 'This is my room, that one over there is Charlie's, that is Joe's, and the next is old John's. Maybe you and your men can find a place in these smaller rooms at one side.'

"They were tramps, all, and the firing began immediately. As the last one flew through the door he sang out mournfully: 'You don't know what you are losing when you lose a man like me!' The former agent had kind-heartedly taken them in, one by one, and before he knew it they were ordering meals, occupying the best rooms and running the place. After they left me they filed over to the United States Refuge Station, where they found quarters, probably as shipwrecked sailors."

But these were not the only tramps in the region. Now and then others dropped in from Heaven knows where; they seemed to blossom out of the frozen