A New Superior Arctic People and THEIR MOUNTAIN of COPPER

Captain Christian Clengenberg, skipper of an Arctic whaling vessel, held in the jail at San Rafael pending a hearing in the federal court on the charge of murdering his mate some time ago, tells a remarkable story of discovery of a new tribe of natives in the unknown interior of Prince Albert Land. He also tells of being guided across the rocky barren by the native Indians to a wonderful mountain of pure copper ore, to which he claims the right of ownership by treaty with the natives.

Captain Clengenberg contends that his discovery of this immense body of ore has led to all his recent trouble. He says that he is being prosecuted by certain men who are interested in wresting his copper right from him, and that these men, who are now on this coast fitting out an expedition into the Arctic, are doing everything within their power to have him detained in prison until they shall have accomplished their ends.

"But despite all this," he says, "I have every confidence that the natives will abide by their treaty with me to the effect that I only, of all white men, shall be permitted to know anything about this mountain of copper, or to be allowed to carry any of the ore away."

By Jack Jungmeyer

AN interview with Captain Christian Clengenberg, skipper of a whaling vessel recently returned from the Arctic, develops the rather startling fact that there are still on this continent distinctive races of natives whom the white man has never discovered in all his searchings, even when breaking trail into those far desolations whither his lust for gold or his passion for adventure have lured him. That these aborigines with whom the white man has heretofore never come in contact are probably of finer moral and mental fiber than most of the tribes of the northern frontier with whom he has had intercourse for the last century is even more astonishing. The account of Captain Clengenberg's discovery of such a primitive folk in the unknown interior of Prince Albert land, where he and his crew were driven in their vessel during the furious arctic storms of 1905, reveals the seeming wizardry of a condition of life germane to a younger age projected suddenly forward into the complacent present where it seems decidedly incongruous, especially in the northern half of this continent. The account further pushes home the fact that, although the world may have become quite small in those regions where its circumferences have been spanned by steel rails and copper wires, up there in the white north, grim land of inscrutability, where distance is not measured by miles or meters, but by foot lengths, lung gasps and the limit of endurance, the world is still very big and ruthless and unconquered; that it has kept many things carefully concealed throughout all these years from the snow blinded white man's gaze.

Captain Clengenberg is a dark, wiry little Dane in whose eyes glimmers the restless fire of his race, and, true to the tradition and predisposition of his blood, he has been a wanderer all his life, called particularly by the siren of the polar land. He possesses the rare faculty of vizualizing his experiences so that they become actual before the eyes of his listeners. His ability to express himself lies principally in his vigorous, suggestive gestures, learned in a land where the hand speaks with greater understanding than the tongue. Under the spell of his recital the room in which we sat quickly dissolved and I found myself in that vastness of snow and graying sky wherein this intrepid explorer of the north had found his true habitat. A cold, bleak prospect it was, stretching away in endless desolation with only here and there the meaningless accent of exposed rock or bastard spruce to arrest the fugitive eye—Prince Albert land, that great, unknown territory off the northern coast of Canada. It was there, while his ship lay imprisoned in the ice throughout the long winter, that Captain Clengenberg found the tribes of the Nuna-Katiks and Senani-Enooks, about 1,000 in number, who had never before seen a white man.

"My ship," said the captain, "together with a good many other whalers, had been driven far into the north by the severe storms that visited the polar regions in the fall of 1905. We were helpless to combat the fury of the winds, and were finally driven on a desolate coast of Prince Albert land during the early part of the winter. Immediately the floes drifted in and formed about the ship, the weather growing constantly more severe, so that I knew we were to be marooned for the winter. This was rather an alarming state of affairs, even for one accustomed to the rigors and privations of the Arctic, because I was unfamiliar with the territory into which we had been driven; did not know whether the usual game of that latitude frequented this bleak coast—and food is always the chief concern up there. My ship was only a 40 ton schooner and we carried very little food, even when in full supply. My doubt as to the game supply of the district seemed to be corroborated by the fact that as the days passed into weeks there was still no evidence that the land was inhabited by natives.

The Aborigine Band

"I had in my crew two native Indians whom I sent out with dogs and guns and traps to a point some 40 miles from the ship to try for seal and fox. They had been out perhaps a week when they came hurrying back to the ship one evening with the report that they had seen several wild natives who had been robbing their traps of the foxes, and that when they had attempted to engage the wild people in talk they had fled across the snow into the low hills skirting the shore. The aborigines had come upon the traps my Indians had set for fox and had followed the deep footmarks of my men to the point where they had erected their snow huts.

"I sent my Indians back, supplying them well with ammunition, but advising them not to fire upon the natives except under extreme provocation. I immediately packed my dog sled, strapped on a couple of rifles, and, taking one of my crew with me, set out for the point the day after my Indians had left the ship. I expected trouble, because I knew that the frightened wild men would return within a few days, bringing with them a force of their tribe, and that they might attack my men. I traveled rapidly, pushing my dogs to the limit, and covered the 40 miles in two days. We were well exhausted when we came in sight of the snow huts on the point. In front of one of the houses the Indians had managed to kindle a fire, and its smoke was rising cheerily against the blue dusk as we came toiling up the last stretch of the long pull. Everything seemed peaceful and quiet, belying my fears that something might already have happened.

"Suddenly, as my mate and I swung around a little hillock, we ran right into a band of some 150 wild natives slinking down upon the camp. It was a mutual surprise, and they were as startled, or possibly more so, than were we. Like a flash, when the first shock of surprise had passed they had jumped into a long line, strangely suggestive of the flight line of wild geese, and came skipping down upon us in a wide inverted arrow until they were on three sides of us. Then they stopped and closed in until they were within a few yards of us. We had not unstrapped our guns, so that we were completely at their mercy. Any way, it would have meant instant death had we attempted to use the rifles. Every native carried a long handled knife in each hand, and as I shrank back against the sled I could feel them flashing close behind my back. I did not know just what to do; the surprise had been so sudden and the menace of the natives was so imminent that my mind had become numbed. Then an idea flashed up. In the front row of the wild folk as they thronged up close I noticed an old hag who made strange guttural noises to which the bucks seemed to listen as to an oracle. I decided that if there was any leadership among that bunch of devils it lay in this old woman, and I knew that our only hope lay in gaining the good will of the withered hag.

"The wild natives continued to swing slowly around us with a queer stamping twitch of the legs and a jerking movement which flapped the deer ears they had sewed to each side of their fur caps just over the temples in perfect rhythm. Not one of them uttered a sound. Even the old hag had ceased rumbling out her gutturals and circled silently like the rest. The only sounds were the thump of their moccasined feet on the beaten snow and the whistle of their breath. But their eyes, fixed upon us without a waver, bored holes through us. It was the weirdest and most thrilling sight I have ever seen, despite the menace it carried. The terrible beauty of that death circle of wild men up there under the gathering dusk of the arctic evening—the great, primitive feel of the thing—was more responsible for the chills that rippled along my back than was the fear I felt for our personal safety. The very awe of it held me spellbound a moment. But I saw murder mounting rapidly in those eyes and I mustered up courage to do what some instinct within me had prompted.

An Arctic Hug

"I stepped forward and as the old witch who had assumed leadership of the horde swung by me in the circle, a little apart from the rest, I caught her suddenly about the waist with both arms as though she were my long lost sweetheart, gave her a tremendous hug and rubbed noses with her in the most approved and polished of native caresses. Well, you should have seen those natives! At first they were inclined to resent it; their astonishment escaped them in a long gasp as I continued to caress the old hag. Then they burst out laughing, clapped their hands with approval and lowered their weapons. They crowded around me and I had to rub noses with the whole gang, men and women, until I began to think that perhaps my brilliant idea had not been such a happy one after all. But it saved our lives, of that I am certain. After that establishment of good will between us and the aborigines everything went along without a hitch.

"I invited them in sign talk to come over to my camp, and there in a primitive manner introduced my two thoroughly frightened Indians to them. At first some glowering looks were exchanged, but by nightfall everything of a disturbing nature had quieted and the whole tribe went peacefully to sleep in the snow shelters they had erected about our camp in a surprisingly short time. I stood watch all night, but we were in no wise molested and the morning sun, streaming quickly up over the sparkling vista, never shone down on a more serene camp than ours. I remained with the natives three days before returning to the ship, trading whatever I had which was to me of little value for the skins and copper implements and vessels which they on the other hand valued at little, showing them those stratagems in conquering nature which have become the obvious with the white man but still remain the miraculous of primitive nations, and generally establishing myself in their good graces. Their language, limited to some hundred gutturals, was so simple that I acquired it without much effort; augmenting it with the sign talk which is universally understood I got on famously with them.

"From the old woman, who must have reached the century mark in age, and on whom I had made a favorable impression from the first time I rubbed noses with her, I received a crude account of the origin of her race as it is now.

"'Long time ago,' she said, 'before my father was—even before his father—we live over there, far away.' She pointed across the eastern horizon, pointed slightly up, the way a man holds his rifle when he makes a long distance shot. 'Then one time come a big sickness and all our people scattered. Some go this way and some that way, but we come here. This my father tell me.' Further than that she was at a loss to account for their origin or early migrations. From what I gathered she meant they had originally migrated from Greenland, or thereabouts, and that one branch, following the general trend of the Canadian coast, had traveled south, while the other branch—the one from which the Nuna-Katiks and the Senani-Enooks are directly descended—had followed the northern coast line in a westerly direction, going out into the farther confines of Prince Albert land when that territory was probably still a part of the continent.

"We never see white man before you come," she continued. "One time long ago we think we see strange white persons around a great ship with big white skins (sails) stretched over it on big sticks growing on ship. Ship freeze up tight all winter in ice, and sometime we see persons move around over snow near it, but we afraid to go see. Then one time when we take time to make ourselves brave to go see with much dancing the ship all at once break out ice and gone away." This must have been the British exploring ship, Investigator, which was abandoned on the coast of Banks land in 1851, because the woman went on to say that later in the season they had again come upon the ship stranded and beaten to pieces by the seas now, and had found what I knew from her description to have been brass cannon.

"The natives themselves, however, are not dark, some of them being nearly white of skin, although their features and hair are practically like those of the other northern natives. They have greater stature than the continental native and are generally their physical superior.

Vigorous and Hardy

"They are, moreover, a decidedly proud and jealous race, passionately envying each other an accomplishment, a trait of character, or a peculiar physical endowment. Their condition of health is remarkably good. During the winter I spent with them I saw absolutely no sickness among them and learn from them that they seldom succumb to any sickness. They are generally a superior people.

"The laws of the tribe are made in oral council by the older members, and whatever they decide upon as being proper and expedient is lived up to in both spirit and letter by the younger members. There seems to be no idea of an organized court of justice among them, but when an individual commits what is generally conceded among the mature members of the tribe to have been a punishable crime, a number of the young bucks organize themselves into a primitive vigilance committee, whose duty it becomes to watch the actions of the criminal; then, if his behavior is good, he is not molested and his crime is apparently forgiven and forgotten. He is put on probation, as it were, much as is the system in our juvenile court. If his subsequent behavior, however, is not in accord with the standards of the tribe, the vigilantes fall upon him some time when he is alone and he is punished with the degree of severity his case seems to demand. Thievery is punishable with death among them—that is, continued, aggravating thievery. Murder is avenged by the family or families most interested in the homicide. In this case might generally makes right.

"The second evening of my stay among them one of the men slipped into my snow shelter while I was out looking after the dogs and stole one of my shirts. I immediately went out into the open before the camp, where I had established a sort of forum, gathered together the whole tribe and openly denounced the thief. It was rather a hazardous thing to do in view of the fact that I knew these people so imperfectly. But when I had gathered them about me I told them about the theft and gave them my opinion of the thief. I told them that in my country men who stole were considered dogs. At this they were silent a moment, pondering. Then they arose in a body, many of them laughing at the analogy I had pointed, and, grouping themselves about the thief, where he had stood apart from the others, they jeered and shamed him unmercifully, yelping like dogs and capering around him in mocking antics which so humiliated the poor fellow that the punishment was quite sufficient to teach not only him but the whole tribe the lesson I had intended. After that, although I frequently left my camp unguarded, I never again had anything stolen.

"During the first winter of my imprisonment in Prince Albert land I met only a very few of the natives, but the second winter I followed them inland, taking with me only my daughter as a companion, and remained back in the hills throughout the next spring and summer. One day we came into a large camp of the Senani-Enooks and were quickly surrounded in much the manner in which my mate and I had been surrounded the season previous while going to the relief of my Indians on Forty Mile point. Evidently there were some among their number who had seen us before, however, and the threatening dance about us ceased almost as soon as it had begun. They seemed to be more curious about my young daughter than myself and asked me presently whether she were boy or girl. When I answered girl all the women of the tribe immediately rushed forward, surrounded her and fairly carried her into one of the skin tents, where they warmed and fed her with the most solicitous care. Women seem to be held in rather high respect among the Enooks, and the advent of a white woman among them was a great occasion. As a mere man, even if white and therefore a rarity, I faded completely into the background for the time being.

"This unusual respect of the savage for the female of his species is, perhaps due to the fact that there are fewer women in the tribe than men, and also from the fact that with them marriage is monogamous. The older women have just as much of a voice in the governmental affairs of the tribe as do the men, and the women are not the abject, cringing creatures they usually are among primitive people. Some of them are quite pretty, too.

A Copper Mountain

"It was on this trip inland, during the second season of my stay, that I first noted that all the Nuna-Katiks' implements of the kitchen, as well as the hunt bowls for holding water, crude mortars, knives, spears, arrows, etc., were made of pure beaten copper. Naturally my curiosity was aroused, and upon questioning them I learned that far back in the interior there was a veritable mountain of pure copper. They spoke of it as having poured in molten streams out of the crater of a volcanic cone in ages past, and said that there were small ravines and valleys literally full of the valuable metal, lying pure and exposed as it had cooled. Whenever they needed new implements some of the tribe, deputized for the purpose, wended their way inland and brought back as much metal as was needed. It was beaten into shape with stone hammers on stone anvils. There must have been nearly a ton of copper in one of the larger camps I visited. I expect to return to the Arctic soon and make my fortune out of that mountain of copper. I have a treaty with the Nuna-Katiks to the effect that I shall have all the copper I may want in return for the rifles and fishnets I shall bring them.

"For long years these people believed themselves to be the only inhabitants of the world—the little world of barren promise they knew—but in latter years they had seen an occasional dog which had in some way drifted over from the mainland on the ice floes, and had begun to suspect that there might be other people across the southern horizon. The nearest settlement of white men is the northwest mounted police station on Herschell island, some 500 miles across the ice and the chill, blue seas, and in the grim northland 500 miles is a great distance—an infinity to a people who have neither dogteam nor sailboat.

"According to these natives there is yet a great deal of land in that northern archipelago of which Prince Albert land and Banks land are segments, which the white man has not even found, much less explored. They speak in a vague way of land to the far northwest of them which is not to be found on any chart or map. It is truly a land of fascination and mystery, the portion of the earth lying up there under the arch of the weird northern lights—a land that pulls and tugs at a man's heart and soul when he is away from it, bidding him return to its vastness, its untrammeled plains and seas and its big freedom.

"And the people—well, they are my people, my own people! Didn't I find them? Of course, I will admit that the haunting vision of that great, majestic mountain of copper rising in dun splendor against the deep purple of the arctic heaven is also in some measure responsible for my desire to return to the land of the Senani-Enooks."

Captain Christian Clengenberg.