

**OUR STRANGE PEOPLE TO THE NORTH**

By Frank G. Carpenter

The Indians of interior Alaska are excited over the building of the government railroad. They see the whites taking up homesteads, and fear they will swallow the country. They know the fate of the Indians of the United States proper, and they want the government to set aside land where their fishing and hunting will not be disturbed. Not long ago, the seven chiefs of the tribes of the Tanana and Yukon valleys met at Fairbanks. They came to consult with their friends among the whites, and see if the government could not be induced to give them a reservation. In talking with them Judge Wickersham, the Alaska delegate to Congress, advised them to have their people take out a lot of homesteads in one block. He said it would be difficult for them to do this after the whites had come in, and said they should act promptly. One of the chiefs replied that he thought all of Alaska belonged to the red men, and he wanted to know what the conditions actually were.

These Indians would rather have a large reservation than a number of individual homesteads. They want to live together and keep out the whites. Moreover, they need large tracts for trapping, and the fur business will be wiped out by the division of the land.

The government has been setting aside reservations for the Indians in various parts of Alaska. The Aleutian Islands are practically one reservation. Annette Island, where Metlakatla is located, is another, and the Hydaburg reservation, consisting of twelve square miles on the western coast of Prince of Wales Island, is a third. The tract of 800 acres on the Chilkat river, not far from Skagway, has been given to the Klukwan Indians, and there are forest reservations where the Indian can trap and hunt at will.

The Indian chiefs who met at Fairbanks to council with the whites were remarkable men. They were tall and fine looking. They wore clothes which were much the same as the whites, save that they had on their ceremonial jackets bordered with fur, and beaded moccasins covered their feet. Each wore a great necklace of beads, which was probably a badge of his chieftanship, and the hair of all was cut short. I have a photograph of the chiefs. Their faces are Mongolian in cast, and several of the men looked much like Japanese. All show great strength of character, and I doubt if a stronger and better looking body of rulers could be found anywhere. They are of Athapaskan stock, and they form a part of that great family of Indians which is scattered throughout Northern Canada, extending on into Central Alaska. They are about the same as the Navajos, and some other Indians of our Southwestern states.

The Eskimo inhabit the region along the coast of the Arctic ocean and Bering sea, taking in the deltas of the Yukon, the Kuskokwim and other rivers, and extending down into the Alaskan peninsula. The Indians are found here and there on the mainland and especially in the great plateau of the Yukon. There are some in the Aleutian Islands and about Prince William sound, and there are a great many along the coast and on the islands of Southeastern Alaska.

The Alaskan Indians are of a half-dozen different stocks. The Athapascans number just about four thousand. They are divided into twelve tribes, and may be seen all along the Yukon and Tanana rivers. The Aleuts are closely allied to the Eskimos. They number perhaps fifteen hundred. They live in the long island chain which extends from Southwestern Alaska almost to Asia. They are fishers and hunters. They have some artistic ability, and the finely woven baskets which come from Alaska are made by their women. The Thlingit is an Indian family that is found scattered through Southeastern Alaska. It numbers four or five thousand, divided among a dozen or more tribes, including the Auk, the Chilkat, the Kake, the Sitka, Stikine, Tongas, Yakutat and others. The Klukwans are Thlingits and so are the Hunas. These people are semi-civilized, and nearly every tribe has its own church and school. And then there are the Haidas, numbering five or six hundred, and the Tsimseans, who were brought from Canada by Father Duncan. Both of the latter tribes live on the islands of Southeastern Alaska.

On my way down the Yukon I saw many of the Athapascans. They have camps near the white settlements, and one sees their salmon wheels along the banks of the rivers, with the fish drying racks nearby. The Indians use fish wheels to catch the winter supply of salmon for themselves and their dogs. The wheels are so made that they are turned by the current. They have great nets attached to them, into which the fish swim and are carried up into the air and dropped into a box, while the Indians sit on the bank and smoke at their leisure. Every few hours the fish are taken out of the boxes. They are cleaned by the women and hung on the racks in the sun to dry. They are then taken home and laid away in the cache, or high shed upon poles that stands beside each Indian home. This is to keep them away from the dogs and wild animals. The cache is reached by a ladder and the fish are brought down as needed.

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