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ALASKA LETTER.

Kake Village.

Kake Village is situated about midway the seaward side of Kuprianof Island. It is on a gravelly beach formed from the debris deposited by the swish of the waters. A good beach is a prime requisite with the Indian. The sea being his highway and his canoe his vehicle, he desires such a slope of bottom and depth of water as will enable him to launch his "yawk," as he calls it, easily. This beach is all that could be desired being neither too steep for the hauling in of canoes nor of too gradual descent for putting them afloat. A reef of rocks breaks the force of the northern blasts, while a point of land shields from the fury of the east wind. The village consists of twenty houses, most of them very poor structures indeed. Only two have store windows, windows of glass. They are built in loose shed fashion and many of them covered with bark. It is no wonder the denizens leave as soon as warm weather approaches, and remain nomandic dwellers in tents as long as possible. Their summer houses are much more desirable and cleanly than their winter abodes, because of almost daily change.

In 1869 the Kake Indians murdered two white traders. The territory of Alaska being then under military control, Davis the commander at Sitka sailed to Kake Village to demand the murderers. The Indians fearing the vengeance likely to follow had fled and the irate marine found only vacant houses. These he ordered the Saginau to bombard, and shot and shell left abundant ventilation in roof and wall.

"Who do these houses belong to?" I asked one Indian. "Oh nobody," said he. "The men who built them have all died and we just live in them." It is very evident from the lack of needed repairs, that the "tenant rent free" system is a failure.

A dead Thlinget has a house all to himself, while a living one must share his with twenty or thirty others. There are twenty-one dead houses of all styles of architecture, realizing by enclosures, decorations and symbols, every idea within the limits of savagery and grotesqueness. These close flank the village at either end, as if the friends and relatives desired to keep the departed as near as possible. The modern thus has for his next door neighbor an ancestor of the long ago. What ever may be the influence of these neighborly influences, one thing is certain, the Indian of to day is very little advanced beyond his progenitor, in the scale of civilization.

Near the center of the village is a house of more pretentions than the rest. Over the door, printed in large letters are the English words, "Chief of the Kake's Tribe Nagau Yanataku." This is where 'Chief Tom' resides. His present house is full of lumber. He has been successful in amassing blankets etc., and intends to pull down and build larger. The men of the village will assist him to erect the structure and then all will have a grand time at his 'house warming' and of course at his expense.

CHIEF TOM VISITS.

Democracy in its purest form exists among the Alaska Indians. It is hardly proper to say Democracy either, for they have never reached that point of advancement in which that body politic, "the will of the majority," exists. True they have a sort of tribal relation, but no councils, no rules, no laws. Every man is therefore a law unto himself. A Thlinget Chief has very little authority. His position is accorded him more as a reward for the number and magnitude of the potlatch or gift distributions he has made, each successive one raising him a step in the social scale. It is a sort of an aristocracy of squandered wealth and the chief a bright and shining example of a spendthrift. The title of chief, as the possession of property, descends collaterally, the nephew, son of the oldest sister inheriting the dignity.

When the United States came into possession of Alaska, these petty chiefs sought the officials and secured from them letters patent, "skookum paper," confirming them in their position. It is said that some of them paid roundly for these paper certificates, the officers pocketing the fees as perquisites. In addition to the letters, the chiefs sought soldiers coats, brass buttons, badges and etc., anything calculated to make a display. Your first acquaintance with one of these dignitaries is by a package of these paper credentials, letters of introduction from decapitated carpet baggers, who have passed through Sitka on their way to join the unknown ranks of presidential appointers.

We had been a month at Kake, long enough to satisfy the most rigid etiquette, when Chief Tom paid us a visit. It was in the school room when I was startled by three sounding raps on the door. On opening it, I recognized in the soldier coat, brass buttons, marine cap, polished cane and G. A. R. Badge, Nagau Yanataku, Chief of the Cakes. He stepped into the room with dignity and extended his hand which I grasped in Quaker style. It is very rare for Indians to be effusive in their greetings and for a chief to be so, would be very undignified. We were scarcely seated when his son, a lad of some thirteen years entered, bearing two fore quarters of venison, which the father signified was a present. A right royal gift it was too, fat and nicely dressed. He then presented his bundle of papers which I read and about which I questioned him. He then proceeded to tell some of the troubles of the "head that wears the crown." When he had finished, I asked him if the real trouble was not in making hootchinoo. He acknowledged that it was the "root of all evil." I suggested the advisability of calling a council and voting out hootchinoo. If you can't have prohibition 'local option' is next best. He spoke of school and thought it would be a good thing. He said I had come to tell the people how to do right and he expected to have a rest. I told him that would not do. I had only come to help. He named me "Father of the Kakes." Possessing quite a youthful physiognomy, I consider this title as a reward for having taken the Vow of the Nazarite. I told him it were better for me to be a brother. He said the Indians wanted a store at which they could buy paint tools, etc., and fix up their houses, but said emphatically, "We don't want any colasses." When he rose to go I thanked him for the venison, telling him it was "strong food." That I in return would present him some white man's fruit, very sweet, at the same time handing him two cans of peaches. He gave me the Indian's koo loo chish, thank you, shook my hand warmly and departed.

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