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THE NATIVE WOMEN OF OUR COLONY.

It will be very hard to clearly describe, in one short article, all of the various interesting traits of native women in Alaska; not altogether on account of the vast extent of that territory, almost equaling the United States east of the Mississippi, but for the fact that there are no less than three distinct races of people in our far-away colony, differing radically in habits, manners, and customs.

Their differences are not those minor ones of our Indian tribes in the West, essentially one race, but the greater ones of three distinct races,—the Indian, the Eskimo, and the Aleut,—all differing as much from each other as the negro from the Mongolian, or the latter from the Caucasian again. It has been my fortune to have spent varying times among the three great races of Alaska mentioned above; and to describe their women and their peculiar relations to the savage communities to which they belong is the main object of my article.

As Italy has been compared in its outline to a boot, and the Scandinavian peninsula to a donkey's head, so Alaska has been spoken of as resembling an inverted bullock's head, which figure one will readily recognize by looking at its map. This fancied resemblance makes our description easy; for the left or western horn of this boreal bullock is inhabited by the Aleuts, the eastern horn, or narrow strip along the Pacific coast, being peopled by the Indians,—Tlinkit tribe,—while all the rest is given up to the Eskimo, who have by far the greatest territory and the largest numbers.

It is very gratifying to note, at the first, that among all the three races of Alaska, their women are treated much better than among savages in general; and while they are but drudges at the best, it is more because life is harder in wresting an existence from nature in the north, than by the demeanor of the "lords of creation" in that far-away bit of earth. There seems to be something in the atmosphere or Northwestern climate to make it so; for although the Eskimo from Greenland to Behring's Strait are the best of savages in their treatment of the women, and the Aleuts are confined to Alaska, and we can compare them with no outside brethren, yet here are a couple of tribes of Indians, who, in

lower latitudes, are so brutal to the female sex, but in Alaska concede many rights to their much better halves that are absolutely unknown to the nations and races which assume they are civilized.

I do not mean "women's rights" in the ordinarily accepted political term, for the elective franchise has been given to no person, white or native, in Alaska territory; all of the government officials being appointed by the President, while the Indians have no method of voting in determining their affairs. But, notwithstanding this, the highest place "in the gift of the people"—I mean the Indian people—is decided in a quaint way in which the predominating power is that wielded by women, or, probably better speaking, wielded by the men in deference to a long-established superstition that makes woman paramount in the selection.

To illustrate: Let us suppose that an Alaskan Indian Chief has departed for the happy hunting-ground, and has left a widow and several children of both sexes in this land where the hunting is not so good. According to all of our ideas of regal succession, the queen or the eldest child, or, if such be a daughter, possibly the eldest boy would sway the savage scepter in the future. None of these, however, have such good fortune; but the *nearest* male relative of the queen, a nephew, an uncle, or a male cousin, is chosen for the future chief or king. Where two or more relatives of the royal widow are seemingly of equal relation to her, the aristocratic element of the tribe—for there are upper, lower, and intermediate clans, having but little social relation to each other—determine the fortunate one, I am told; but this is seldom necessary, as the line of succession is pretty well determined by other superstitious lines of conduct beforehand. There is no waiting until the king is dead to determine the heir, however, for he is as certainly selected, and even his alternate known, as if he succeeded by our more simple methods of royalty.

If the heir is young and unmarried, nothing can be known of his successor until he is joined in wedlock; for it is one of his wife's male relations who will capture the prize, whoever she may be. It is not very hard to see that when



INTERIOR INDIAN WOMAN.

go jumping from one family into the other, no one knowing two generations ahead where it will land, and governed only by the seemingly incompatible edicts of the Salic law and "women's rights."

But the royal succession or chieftainship is not the only matter which descends on the woman's side among these gentle savages; for all property and even the sacredness of the family history is subject to the same law. However much the man may have the management of the common property during the life of a married couple, he has absolutely nothing to say as to how it shall be distributed upon their demise; for it is already settled by the strange customs of the tribe that it shall all descend on the woman's side, to her nearest relatives. Thus, when an Alaskan Indian has "great expectations" from departing loved ones, it is sure to be on account of rich female relations.

The husbands have seemingly everything to do with the management of common property, as far as use and employment are concerned, but the instant it is to go out of the household by sale or barter, the better half (or two-thirds to three-fourths) regulates the entire affair, and can annul or veto any sale or exchange of her husband's, even after the money has been paid or the barter has passed to an exchange of goods. This singular state of affairs has caused more petty trouble in Alaska between the whites and Indians than any other source I can now recall. Most of the white men there are of that kind who hate to see a woman "stick her jaw in," especially to undo a good bargain that they thought was past recalling. The husband has no such right in the woman's shopping, nor does he ever think of anything more than the meekest suggestions in such matters.

once the young heir presumptive is chosen by this curious deference to women's rights, "match-making" will be lively among the Alaskan Indians, and every aristocratic family with an eligible daughter will be trying to their utmost to secure the strangely made heir for her husband, as they secure not only royal representation in her, but also absolute royalty itself in her nearest male relative, only to be surrendered at his death to some unknown family into which he may marry when of age. In this way the crown may

Not that the husbands are "hen-pecked" at all, as my remarks might imply, for beyond the peculiar relations I have explained, there seems to be no difference between them and the ordinary run of other people in like conditions. The women do the hard work of the household, and the men the harder work of keeping it supplied with everything; and rough and severe as the work necessarily is, it is somewhat fairly divided according to the strength and capability of each. No such brutal sight, once so common among the Indians of lower latitudes, as an active young warrior (?) reclining in the shade while his wife and aged mother did the men's work towards making him comfortable, is ever seen in Alaska.

There is one prerogative of the Alaskan Indian women that I must not fail to note as showing their perfect equality with the men. Every one knows how common a vice polygamy is among savages (a theme on which many moral writers dwell, and throw stones without stopping to observe the large amount of Mormon glass in our own national conservatory), and in this lack of morality the Alaskans are fully up to the average savage standard; but it is not confined wholly to plural wives: occasionally some lone, forsaken female rises in the majesty of her right and marries a couple of husbands, so as not to be behind the fashionable follies of her tribe.

The author knows personally of one or two instances of this reversible Mormonism, (the punster might say it was the true More-man belief, the decaying Utah version being the More-woman creed), and doubtless many others exist in a community where women have the predominating con-

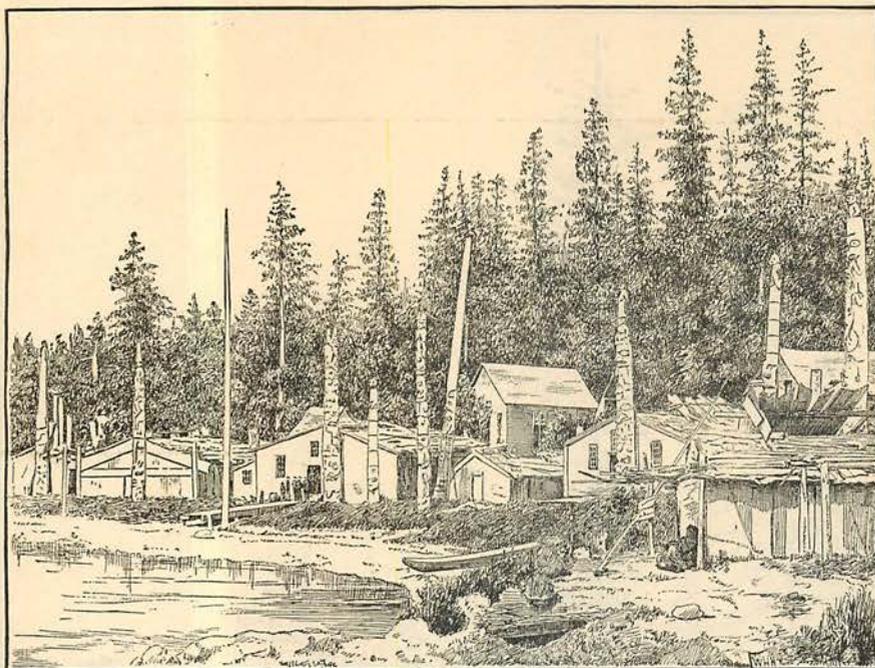


ESKIMO WOMAN'S SUIT.

trol of property, which there, as here, is not wholly inert in influencing and shaping some marriages. But in one case, that of a Sitka Indian woman, no such mercenary motives can be accredited to her. The preliminary statement is needed that these Indians still own slaves; and this Sitka lady is said to have paid in goods, chattels and coin, the rather startling figure of \$1,000 to free a handsome young male slave in order to make him her — I was going to say better-half, but the marital mathematics is too complicated to



ALEUT WOMAN AND CHILD ON THE SEAL ISLANDS.



ALASKAN VILLAGE.

In front of their wooden houses are often seen tall poles, sometimes towering two or three times as high as their little one-story huts, and carved on the outer face from bottom to top. These are called "totem" poles, and are nothing but long sections of the tall trees of the country, which, after being carved on one side, are placed in front of their houses. From a great distance these make the village, always just above high-water mark on the seashore, look as if it had a large fleet of vessels, with great thick masts, in its front.

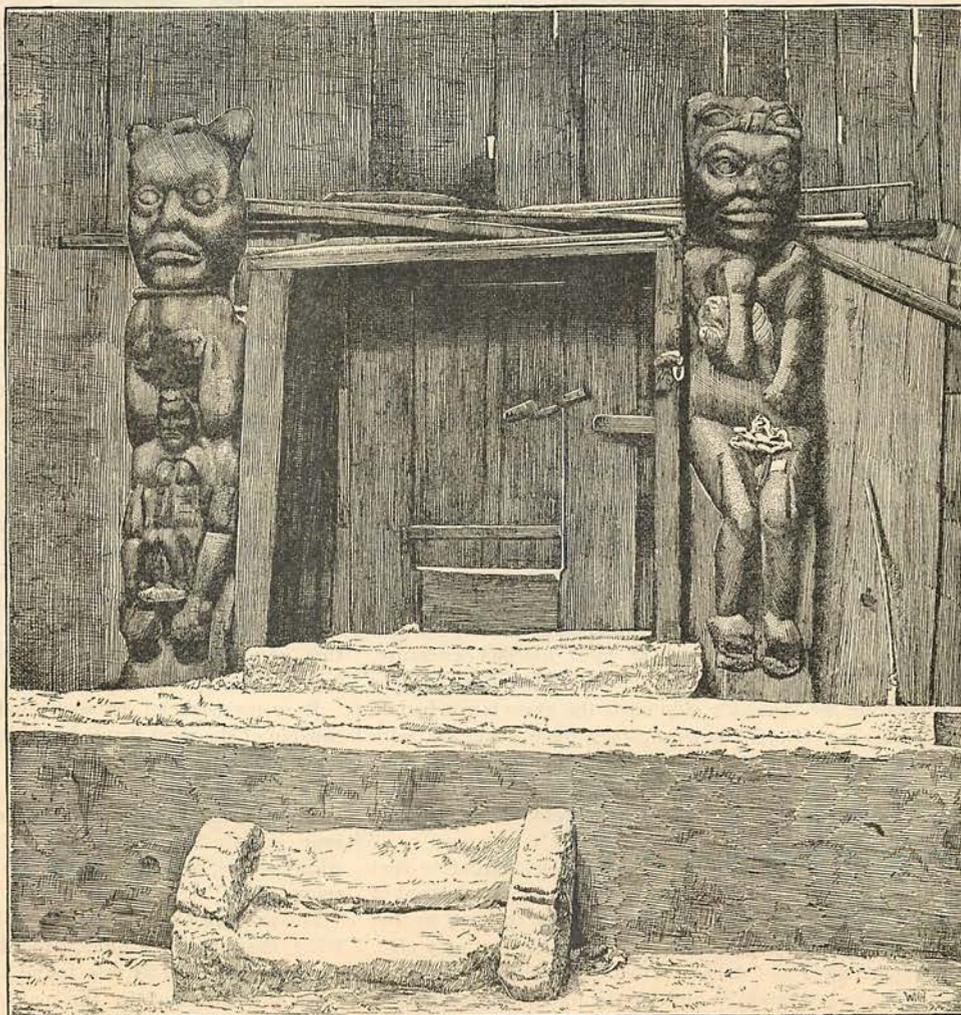
The carvings, while well done as a matter of workmanship, are of the most diabolical character, and each totem-pole looks like a sculptured representation of so many linear yards of nightmare. Grotesque and hideous beasts, birds and fishes, with abnormal limbs, wings and

hazard a fractional figure, as he was No. 2 in her elastic affections. When I last saw them, the husbands were as harmonious as in any case of plural wives that I noticed, for the woman is wealthy and able to supply all the reasonable demands of those dependent upon her.

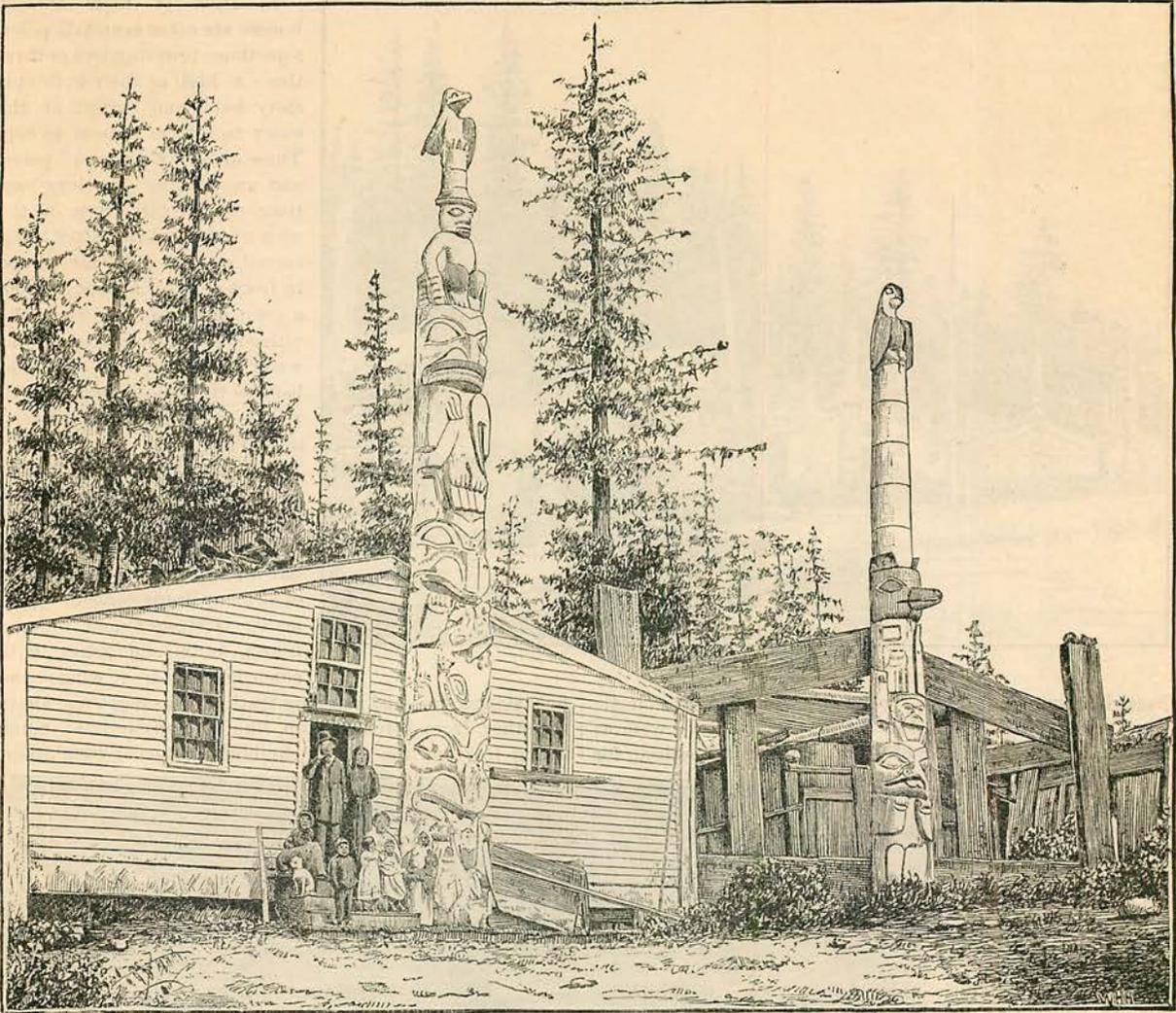
fins, staring eyes and grinning teeth, are arranged one above the other, from bottom to top, like so many imps of Satan trying to reach the sky by climbing on top of each other.

If suffrage is ever given to the Indian and extended to Alaska, it will have to include female suffrage, from the peculiar relations of the two sexes there, or there will be a political unpleasantness in that country on the subject, such as has never been known elsewhere.

I have said that the family histories are regulated by the female side of the house, and this assertion would seem to indicate that they have means of preserving histories, a rare culture among the North American Indians. This assertion is true, limited though the historical information may be; and the means of preserving these scant family facts is in carvings, mostly of wood, in which art, it might be mentioned here, these Alaskan and British Columbian Indians probably excel all others on the continent.



INTERIOR OF ALASKAN INDIAN HOUSE.



"TOTEM" POLES.

Those knowing the subject best say these totem-poles are genealogical records or family trees. Generally two are in front of each house, one for the man and one for the woman; but where there is only one it belongs, as hinted, to the woman, or the woman's family history.

These Indians are divided, socially, into clans, of more or less aristocratic pretensions, and each clan is named after some beast, bird, fish, or reptile, which the carvings are supposed to represent. Thus, to take the totem-pole of the woman, the carving at the top represents the clan to which she belongs, as the Raven, Wolf, or Whale Clan, and by a stretch of the imagination the beast, bird, or what-not can be made out of the sculpture, in most hideous caricature, however. The next below is that of her mother, and so on down on the woman's side until the grass is reached in some ancient female ancestor, each one changing with the clan to which they belonged; and sometimes they are repeated consecutively many times, as one wolf or dog-fish following another like a pack of wolves, or a string of fish.

The man's totem begins with himself similar to that of his spouse, but here the similarity ceases; for instead of continuing backwards on his father's side, to keep up the resemblance, each recurring totem is on his mother's side, and representing the clans to which she and her female ancestors belonged, making both of the totem-poles and their numerous carvings represent only the many clans to which

the women belonged, with the single exception of the one noted, which stands for the "lord of creation" in the household before whose door the totem-pole rears its quaint and curious carved column.

These totem-poles are no longer manufactured by these singular natives since the whites have come among them, and they will soon disappear by rotting, in that very moist climate, or be secured by museums and similar institutions as relics of a most curious but disappearing race of savages. Numbers of these are already to be found in American museums, where they stand as silent monuments of the fact that all forms of justice are not monopolized by civilization, and that all oppression is not to be found among the barbarous.

It seems a racial paradox that such a people could be capable of the most fiendish and horrible cruelty under any circumstance; but the treatment of their slaves, in sacrifices and other ways, shows them to be as barbarous as the average savage in such matters, customs which are, however, rapidly becoming obsolete in their contact with the white people, and the advent of teachers and missionaries among them.

The average business man would also assert, in all probability, that another ethnic paradox had been discovered if any business capacity was found in a race where woman's voice predominated in the management, but such is the fact; and so well controlled are their business affairs that

the Alaskan Indians are to-day the richest, per capita, of any in the United States, not aided in any way by the government, or depending wholly upon their own ability in such matters.

Of the Alaskan Eskimo women, I will repeat that though their lot is hard it is because the surroundings make it so, more than the savage brutality of the men, the most com-

mon cause in the lower races; and both sexes make up a most cheerful, contented race.

The Aleutian women seem to be about midway between the other two races in their treatment, customs, and habits; while all three races are above the average of savage treatment of women in our far-away colony.

FRED'K SCHWATKA.

THE VAN VLIET MYSTERY.

By GRAFTON DEAN.

(Continued from Page 84.)

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH IT APPEARS THAT MISS VAN VLIET'S RESOURCES HAVE NOT BEEN DRAWN UPON IN VAIN.

HUNT tore the journals open. The first extract read thus:

"July 6.

"All goes on as usual. The house is very quiet. Anthony is in B—, where the court sits at present. Lillia I scarcely see. She is absorbed in her own affairs, as I in mine. I hear nothing from A. Great Heaven! what have I not sacrificed for him! All, all is gone! He must never know it. It could do no good, and would make him wretched. Ah me! will the time never come when these mysteries may be cleared away? They weigh upon my soul. I sometimes fear that my spirit is giving way beneath these troubles. I no longer control my own thoughts. One face is ever before my eyes, one voice sounds ever in my ears. I cannot banish them; indeed, I would not while one ray of hope remains, or even, I fear, after. Though they torture me to madness I cannot give them up. Alas! this is what it is to be a woman and to love! I struggle incessantly to obtain control over myself. I spend hours in endeavoring to stifle this longing which disgraces me even in my own eyes. Then a tone, a smile, a turn of the head,—and I am lost again! I am exhausted by it. I think it cannot last much longer. Oh! if I could only hear one word from A.! But there is nothing, nothing!"

Hunt had read this extract when Hamilton entered hastily.

"Give me the journals, quick," said he. "Alicia has sent for them. Something is required of her so that she cannot go on with the work in the study now, and she dares not leave till the journals are there. Hurry!"

Hunt bundled the papers together instantly, and Hamilton rushed off with them.

"It strikes me," meditated Hunt, when he was left alone, "that we have rather been leaving the emotions out of this little affair. In my humble opinion they have played a conspicuous part in it. I think Ally has suspicions in regard to all this. To-morrow I must have a talk with her; and to-morrow I'll go through the journals thoroughly. They will probably give us all we want. By Jove! it's getting exciting! Is the girl innocent? This passionate and apparently unfortunate love of hers is a thing which

we have entirely overlooked. It makes almost anything possible. Well, until to-morrow I must have patience."

Hunt leaned back and mused for a little. Alicia had recalled him to his detective life so suddenly as to leave him no time for thought; but now Miss Van Vliet's influence grew upon him again. Suddenly he colored to the temples as he realized that she had left him in the belief that he would remain inactive, as she had desired him to do, for her sake. He had even promised this. And—great heavens!—what had he done? Read the very inmost secret of her heart, that which a woman guards to the last, as more precious than life itself!

Hunt sprang to his feet and paced the room. Alicia's presence had transformed him into a detective. As a *detective* his conduct was a matter of course. But Miss Van Vliet had trusted him as a man of honor. As a man of honor what had his conduct been?

"Dastardly!" cried Hunt, dashing his clenched hand down on the table; "nothing less!"

* * * * *

Hamilton, meantime, walked rapidly down the street, and regarded the package of journals with perplexity.

"What the mischief shall I do with them?" he muttered. "But I'll be hanged if he shall read them, or any one else either," he added, with heat. And after some meditation he conveyed the papers to what he considered the most suitable place for them.

* * * * *

The next day, at three o'clock P. M., Hunt and Hamilton awaited Alicia's arrival. They were both very silent and thoughtful. Finally Hunt, descriing Alicia's *petite* figure hastening up the street, screwed his courage to the sticking-point, and spoke.

"The long and the short of it is that I am not going to read any more of those journals," said he, concisely. "If you choose to do it, Jack, you may. But don't you tell me anything about them. I wash my hands of the business. I won't look at them."

"I—a—ahem!—I don't think I will either," said Hamilton.

Alicia entered hastily, her eyes shining with excitement and anxiety.

"Stillman Hunt, have you read those journals?" said she. "Only one extract, which does not bear upon the case in hand," said Hunt, with reserve.