

Wade Mary Hazelton Blanchard

Little Folks of North America



Mary Wade

Little Folks of North America

«Public Domain»

Wade M.

Little Folks of North America / M. Wade — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Foreword	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

Mary Hazelton Wade

Little Folks of North America

Stories about children living in the different parts of North America

Foreword

You all know the story of Columbus – how, more than four hundred years ago, he sailed from Spain out into the west; and also how the people, as they watched his ships fading from sight, believed they would never look upon the fleet again, for the brave sailors who manned it were moving into an unknown world whose dangers no one could measure.

You also remember what happened before Columbus returned from that long voyage – that a new continent was discovered where strange people of a race before unheard-of were living the life of savages, and that the great sailor, believing he had entered the waters of India, named these red men, Indians.

Instead of reaching India, as he supposed, he had brought to light a new and great continent – so vast that it embraced all climates; rich, moreover, in mines and forests, lakes and rivers, high mountains, fertile plains and valleys. And there were none to enjoy all these beautiful gifts of God save tribes of red men, except in the far north the Eskimos in scattered villages. They, too, like the Indians, were savages who knew nothing of the ways of white men. They lived in small settlements along the ice-covered shores of the ocean.

After Columbus had crossed the Atlantic and discovered this New World, other ships soon followed in the course he had marked, and the people of Europe settled in one place after another. At first they made their homes near the shores of the ocean. This was partly through fear of the red men who were not pleased at the thought of these new neighbors, so different from themselves. As years went by, however, the newcomers moved farther and farther into the west, driving the Indians and the wild beasts before them, until now the homes of the white men are found throughout the land. People of unlike faiths and speaking different languages cross the ocean in shiploads, for they feel that when America is reached they will find freedom and happiness.

The Indians who are still left in the country are slowly learning the ways of the white men. They are taught in schools by white teachers. They live in houses instead of the wigwams which were their former homes. They dress in white men's clothes. They even plant gardens and care for their farms in the way of civilized people.

There are many Negroes in North America also, but they are found mostly in the southern part of the United States. They were first brought as slaves from Africa, but are now free and independent. Although they were once savages like the Indians, they have been quick to imitate and have easily fallen into the ways of the white men. Thus the red and the black races, the white and the yellow, can all be found at home in North America, abiding together in peace and comfort as the children of One Great Father should do.

CHAPTER I

Little Folks of Iceland

In the far northeast corner of North America lies the island of Iceland where little Danish children live far from the rest of the world. It is very cold in that northern country, yet the presence of volcanoes there and the lava that spreads over much of the country tell the story that ages ago the island was slowly built up from the lava that flowed from volcanoes rising up out of the bed of the ocean.

However that may be, the boys and girls of Iceland are happy little people who laugh and sing, dance and play as merrily as children who live where the sun shines all the year round and the seasons chase each other so rapidly that Mother Nature is constantly preparing new delights for them.

Away back in the ninth century a great chief called Nadodd left Europe in search of adventure. When he had sailed for a long time he came in sight of a land covered with snow. It seemed a cold, bleak place, but he landed, nevertheless, and gave the country the name of Snowland.

After Nadodd came two Norse chiefs who had quarreled with their king and left Norway to seek a new home. Although they found Snowland or rather Iceland, as it is now called, cold and desolate as Nadodd had done, they decided to settle there and other people from Norway followed them and built homes for themselves and their families along the coast.

These things and many more are written down in a big book treasured by the Icelanders to-day, – how little children were born to the settlers, how they were ruled by their chiefs, and how, after a while, one of their people went back to Europe and listened to the teachings of the Christian religion. He gave up his belief in heathen gods, and when he came back to Iceland he converted the settlers. From that time they, too, were Christians and had Christian ministers among them who taught and helped their little ones and themselves.

As time went by Norway, and with it Iceland, came under the rule of Denmark. Afterwards it became separate again, but Iceland did not, and is to this day looked upon as belonging to the Danes. Most of the children, however, by reading in the famous old book of their people, can trace their families back to the two Norwegian chiefs and their followers who were the first settlers in Iceland.

The children of Iceland live so far north that they know only a short summer. The days then are very long and there is scarcely any night. In the month of June there is really no night at all and there is no way of telling, except by the clock and their own sleepiness, when it is time to go to bed. The winters are quite the opposite. They are very long and bitter cold. Scarcely any of the time does the sun shine, yet the long nights are beautiful, for the moon and stars shine brightly and the northern lights, or aurora borealis, flash over the heavens in a wonderful way not seen in warmer lands.

On the long winter evenings the boys and girls are never happier than when listening to the stories that have been handed down from father to son for hundreds of years. They call these stories sagas. Some of them are legends, and others tell about the lives of people who lived in Iceland from the beginning of its history. There are many poems, too, which the little Icelanders learn “by heart,” and which they repeat in a half-singing tone, after the way of their people. These were written in the long-ago by warriors called “skalds.” They tell of battles and brave deeds and lovely ladies, and the children of to-day think them so beautiful that many of them try to write little poems themselves. This pleases their parents greatly and makes them feel quite proud that their own little ones are following in the steps of their ancestors.

Geysers and Glaciers

Iceland is never without snow and ice. On the warmest summer day the children can look on glaciers, or rivers of ice, that flow so slowly toward the sea from the inland country that one does not see them moving at all.

These glaciers look like broad fields of broken ice, piled up in strange, rough shapes. The summer sun melts the ice ever so little, and those who venture near the edge find rills of water flowing down the sides of the great cakes and boulders. As the glaciers enter the sea masses of ice sometimes break away, and turning over and over in the deep water, right themselves at last and sail out to sea as the icebergs that are often met by sailors on their way across the ocean.

“We have geysers as well as glaciers,” the children of Iceland will tell you, and they are glad to show their knowledge of them to the travelers who visit that distant land. A geyser is a boiling spring which bursts up out of the ground like a fountain, sometimes with such force that the water rises into the air higher than the tallest building you have ever seen.

There are other kinds of hot springs, too, in the country, where the water simply bubbles up. There is one large town in Iceland called Reikjavik, which is the capital of the island, and about a mile and a half away there is a hot spring where the washing is done for the people of the town.

Almost every day women go there from Reikjavik with hand-carts filled with soiled clothing. When they reach the spring they roll up their sleeves, tuck up their skirts, and begin the scrubbing and rinsing, the boiling and wringing that end in making the clothes as white as snow. From time to time they stop to drink coffee and have a friendly chat, but all the washing is done in the open air, without need of stove or fire to help the workers.

Sheds have been built near the spring where the ironing is afterwards done. Then the clothes are neatly packed in the little carts and taken back to the town to be returned to the owners.

The little Icelanders are very fond of their waterfalls, some of which are very beautiful. The country is so rough and rocky that the streams often plunge over steep lava cliffs and fall with a loud roar to the depths below.

There are so few sounds to be heard, because there are no railroads or large factories in the whole country, that the children like to visit these waterfalls and listen to the water as it plunges downwards over the cliffs. Then they return to the quiet farmhouses to play with their lambs and dogs, and to dream of the children of other lands far away where life is so different.

In the Homes

The fathers of the little Icelanders support their families by fishing, by raising cattle and sheep, and by hunting the birds that make their homes on the island during the summer.

Few trees grow in that cold land, so the homes are generally built of turf and lava, neatly painted red and thatched with sod. Small gardens are planted as soon as the long winter is over, and there the boys help in planting cabbages and lettuce, radishes and parsley, flax and turnips. A few potatoes are sometimes raised, too, but only those vegetables that will grow fast ripen in that cold northern land. Short, thick grass grows near the little homes, which are usually built in the valleys protected from the cold winds by the hills around them. There the men tend their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle which graze on the grass in summer and in winter eat the hay which their masters have gathered for them.

The children of Iceland are rather small, but they are quite strong for their size. They have yellow hair and blue eyes and are brought up to be gentle and polite. On week-days they go to school where they are taught very carefully, and on Sundays they go to church with their fathers and mothers, where they sing hymns very slowly and listen to long sermons by their good pastor. Sometimes the

church is too far away to walk the whole distance. Then the whole family ride on ponies to the place of worship, and often, if they have come a very long ways, they are treated to cake and coffee at the minister's house before they start out again for home.

The people are obliged to dress very warmly, and so the women of each household are busy, early and late, carding and spinning the wool from the sheep and weaving it into soft, thick garments for their families.

In every home you will be sure to find the women's fingers moving busily at their work, while the loom and spinning-wheel seems to be constantly in motion.

Almost every home contains many children, who eat fish and drink milk day after day, with little change of food throughout the year. Only the richer families can have bread, for the flour out of which it is made, as well as the coffee and chocolate which even the poorest people manage to buy, must come in ships from Europe. Every one, however, can have cakes made of a kind of moss, or lichen, which grows on the island. Some of it is sent to other countries to use in medicine, and is known as Iceland moss. The children are often sent to gather it for their mothers, who dry it and grind it to powder and then make it into cakes which are boiled and then eaten with milk.

In the summer time the boys and girls hunt for birds' eggs of which they are very fond, and sometimes their fathers kill a sheep or cow, which furnishes fresh meat for several days.

The children love their dogs which are often very pretty and are petted a good deal. They help their masters care for the sheep and are very faithful. Sometimes the cows wander a long ways in search of grass, but with the approach of night they come home to be milked and cared for. The ewes are milked, too, and their young masters and mistresses have no idea how strange this must seem to many travelers. Even the little children learn to ride the stout, patient ponies, and if they have an errand to do for their parents they seldom think of walking, but on to the ponies' backs they spring, and away they go across the snowfields and over the roads till they reach the place for which they are bound.

The little girls are taught to knit and spin and do fine needle work. They help make the clothes for the family, which are of the same fashion, year after year. The mother always wears a black cloth dress with white under waist showing in front, a snowy apron, and on her head is sure to be a black cap with long tassel and a silver ornament. If it is very cold she winds a shawl around her head. Her daughters dress much as she does, except that they wear no caps till they are thirteen or fourteen years old.

The boys help in the work of the farm and go hunting and fishing with their fathers. Herds of reindeer wander over the island and their flesh makes a pleasant change in the daily fare, while the skins furnish thick, warm coats for the Icelanders. There are also foxes, but they and the reindeer are almost the only wild creatures, with the exception of the birds, found in the whole country.

There are many kinds of birds, – gulls, ptarmigans, swans, and wild geese, all come to the island to lay their eggs and raise their young, but the most precious of all are the eider-ducks whose bodies are covered with soft thick down. The mother eider-duck lines her nest with this down which she plucks out from her own breast, thus making a soft and comfortable home for the baby birds. After they are hatched the hunters go about from nest to nest, collecting the down which is taken home and spread out in the sun to dry. Then it is tied up in bags and sold in the town. Some of it is sent away to other countries and made into the eider-down quilts which are sold for a large price.

Getting Fish

During the summer every village along the coast is full of busy people. The men and boys sail or row out to the places where cod and halibut are plentiful, and there they fish from morning till night, when they bring home the "catch" which they give into the care of their wives and daughters. At these times the women wear long waterproof aprons and thick woolen gloves. They, too, are busy all day

long cleaning and splitting the fish at large tanks near the water's edge, then salting and drying them for their own use during the coming year, or to be packed and sent to Reikjavik from which they are shipped to other countries. The fish, together with butter and ponies, are the principal things sent out from Iceland, and the ships that come to receive them bring the sugar, coffee and chocolate, the dishes and tools necessary to the simple housekeeping of the Icelanders.

The Cave of Surtur

There are many caves in Iceland, some of which are used by the farmers for storing their hay and housing their cattle. The most wonderful of them all is the large cave of Surtur, whose floor is carpeted with snow and ice.

The visitor enters a long hall and the dim light of his torch makes him think at first that he is looking at rows of statues. But they are pillars of ice and snow which reach up from the floor and have taken upon themselves many queer forms. Farther on in the hall bars of ice form a large screen before the eyes of the traveler. On every side new wonders meet his eyes as he goes farther and farther underground till at last he longs for the daylight and turns back, glad indeed when he has reached the mouth of the cave once more.

Many people who have visited Iceland say that the grandest sights in the whole world are to be seen in that island. The hills of lava with the ice-fields stretching between them, the geysers bursting forth out of the ground with a sound of thunder, the lofty volcanoes that look like sleeping giants of snow and ice, the great caves whose stalactites are coated with ice, all these things and many more make Iceland a land of wonder to those who visit that lonely island.

CHAPTER II

Little Folks of Greenland

The Coming of Eric the Red

West of Ireland is the largest island in the world. It is called Greenland, but the boys and girls who live there have little reason to know it by such a name, for it is a country of snow and ice where fierce winds are blowing the greater part of the year and where the frost king rules even in the summer-time.

Long ago there were brave sailors in northern Europe called Norsemen, who ventured out into the western waters farther than any other known people at that time. Some of them, as you know, sailed as far as Iceland where they settled and made a home for themselves.

By and by one of these settlers sailed still farther into the west. Fierce storms arose and strong winds blew his ship till he came in sight of a land whose shores were bound in ice. At last the storm passed; then he turned his ship about and sailed for home.

When he reached Iceland he told of what he had seen. Among those who listened to him was another daring sailor, Eric the Red.

Not long afterwards Eric the Red killed another man in a quarrel, and on account of this wrong deed he was told that he could not stay in Iceland, but must leave his home for two years at least.

He now thought of the story he had heard of a land farther west. He said to himself, "I will seek that country and perhaps I will find a home there to my liking."

He set out with a brave heart and sailed on till at last he saw before him a bare and desolate land. He steered his ship past great icebergs and floating masses of ice and entered a harbor.

It was not a pleasant country in which to make a home. There was no person to greet him; not a single tree to offer its shade. Yet he made himself as comfortable as possible and built a house of stone against the side of a steep cliff. He fished in the icy waters and hunted over the snow-covered fields; thus he and his few companions got enough food to keep themselves from starving.

Two winters passed in this new home and Eric the Red, who had been used to hardship, enjoyed himself because he was free to do as he pleased and there were no enemies to disturb him. In fact, all the time he and his followers were in Greenland they met no other people, and so they believed they were the only ones living in that ice-bound country. In their wanderings, however, they discovered that there were many high mountains, deep and narrow bays, and glaciers.

The time came when Eric the Red could go back to Iceland. On his return he said to himself, "I will say that I found a pleasant home in the west. I will give the place the pleasant name of Greenland. Then some of the people will wish to go back with me and settle there."

Eric the Red painted such a delightful picture of his stay in the distant land that a goodly company started out with him in twenty-five ships when he returned to Greenland. Some of these ships were wrecked; others were driven back by fierce winds. Fourteen, however, managed to pass the dangerous icebergs and the great masses of floating ice and entered a narrow harbor.

The people landed on the desolate shore and were soon busy building houses in which to live. There was no lumber because there were no trees, so they had to use stones.

Afterwards small gardens were dug and planted. Sheds were built of stone where the sheep and oxen the people had brought with them could be protected from the biting cold of the long winter and the fearful storms that raged there.

Other settlers followed the first ones and made new homes for themselves on the western coast of Greenland, not far from the place chosen by the first-comers. Here, in rough stone houses, little children were born and grew up to be men and women.

These children did not know the taste of bread. They lived mostly on the meat of seals, walruses, and reindeer, the berries they picked in summer, and the eggs of the wild birds that flew in great flocks over the country when the long, cold winter was over.

They had many a good time, though. They romped in the frosty air; they slid on the ice; they petted their lambs and played games; and then, when evening came, they gathered about their fathers to listen to wonderful tales of adventures with wild animals and of fights for life among icebergs and glaciers. Often they must have held their breath, and their blood must have been stirred as they thought, "Soon we will grow up and we, too, will dare what our fathers have dared."

The Eskimos

More than three hundred years passed by. Then the children of the settlers suddenly discovered that they were not the only ones living in Greenland. Not far to the north there were other boys and girls with yellow skins, black eyes, round faces and mouths ever ready to stretch in smiles. Far different, indeed, they looked from the Norse children with their fair hair and blue eyes.

These little strangers spoke an odd-sounding language and when they pointed to themselves they said, "Innuits," meaning "people." No doubt they and their parents had thought themselves the only people in the world. The Norsemen called them *Skrællings*; but long afterwards, when other white men came to Greenland and noticed the manner of living of the natives, they gave them the name of Eskimos which means, "Eaters of raw meat." To this day we know them as Eskimos.

Not long after they met with the Eskimos the white settlers, with their wives and children, disappeared from Greenland. No one knows the reason. Perhaps they all died from a terrible sickness that visited them at that time. There are some who think they were killed by the natives. At any rate, there were no more white people in Greenland for two hundred years and the little Eskimos lived on as they always had done.

The homes of these children are built to-day just as they were in that far-away time when the Norsemen first saw them. They spend the long cold winter in stone huts. The stones are packed closely together and the chinks are stuffed so tightly with turf that the sharpest wind can not make its way inside. A low passage into the house is also built of stones, but it is so low that even the little children must crawl on their hands and knees when they go in and out of the house.

Can you think of the reason for this? It is because the wind must be kept out of the home at all costs.

When the children have once crept inside, there is not much room over their heads even now, since the house-walls themselves are not more than six or eight feet high. The light is very dim, for the small windows are made of the bowels of seals, as the Eskimos do not have the glass we think so necessary; so they take the best thing they can procure.

A little more light is given by queer, smoky lamps which are stoves as well. Women are busy tending these all the time, or they would smoke so badly that even the Eskimos, who are used to them, could not breathe the air without choking.

Each one of these stove-lamps is made of a piece of sandstone hollowed out somewhat in the shape of a dustpan. Pieces of blubber are placed in the bottom and strips of dried moss are set up along one side for wicks. Here the mothers of the Eskimo children do all their cooking, and here the boys and girls must gather when they wish to warm their fingers if Jack Frost has pinched them.

Heavy seal or bear skins which have been cured and made ready for use hang down from the walls, making them doubly warm.

Along the sides of the hut are platforms where the children sit with their parents and where they stretch themselves among piles of furs for the night's rest. These platforms are usually made of wood, one of the most precious things the Eskimos possess. Since no trees grow in Greenland, the only wood the people had in the long ago drifted to their shores. Often it came from the wrecks of vessels that ventured into the dangerous northern waters after whales. Now-a-days, however, the Eskimos get lumber from white traders in exchange for oil and furs. For about four months of the winter the sun does not show his face at all. The children must be very glad that during that period the moon shines brightly one week out of every four. That is the time for the best fun, – skating and coasting by moonlight when the snowfields and the ice-bound shores glisten like the most wonderful fairyland you can possibly imagine.

Before they venture from their homes their loving mothers see that they put on their bird-skin shirts with the soft feathers worn next to the skin. Then there are stockings of hare or dog skin, and high boots of sealskin.

It would be rather hard at first for you to tell an Eskimo girl from a boy for all the people of the snowland wear trousers which are, of course, much warmer than skirts would be. These trousers, like the boots, are made of heavy skins with the fur on the inside.

The upper part of the body is covered with a short fur blouse. A fur hood and mittens complete the outdoor dress. No suit could be better for traveling over the snow or playing on the icy hillsides than the Greenland mothers make for their little ones.

Hunting for Food

Sometimes the little Eskimos and their parents feast nearly all day long. This is when their fathers have been successful in the hunt and there is plenty of seal and walrus meat on hand. But there are other times when many hours pass by without food and they do not know how much longer they must wait before they can satisfy their hunger.

Sometimes the men are away from home for days together, searching the shore for the food their wives and little ones need so much. When at last they have been successful and returned with their loads, the children run out with their mothers to meet the hunters and take care of the precious prize. The women are armed with long knives with which they quickly cut away the skins. The meat is cut up, and with shouts of laughter the children crawl through the narrow passage into the hut and gather around their mothers, as pieces of the meat are placed in stone dishes and hung over the lamps to cook.

It may be, that while the children sit eagerly watching for some seal-blood soup to be prepared, the women throw them pieces of blubber which they eat greedily.

All this time the men are stretched about on the low platforms, joking and telling stories while they wait for the feast to begin. As they wait, some of them busy their fingers carving toys out of walrus-teeth for the children, – tiny reindeer, seals, sledges, birds or muskoxen.

When the dinner is ready a large dish of food is placed in the middle of the floor, the big folks and little sit around in a circle and help themselves with their fingers. After dinner come songs and dances in which the children take their part.

It is very likely that over on a low shelf a mother dog is lying with her puppies, and the children go to her from time to time and play with their cunning little pets. The Eskimos are fond of their dogs, and are very careful of the puppies, which are brought up in the house with their own children from the time when they are born till they are big enough to take care of themselves.

Eskimo Dogs

The boys and girls of the far north would be very lonely without their trusty dogs. They play with the puppies during the long winter days. Then, as soon as their little pets are old enough, the boys begin to train them. First, the animal must be taught to obey their young masters. Then collars are made, and with long straps of leather, these are fastened to low sledges made of drift wood and walrus lines. The sledge is drawn by a number of dogs, each of which is fastened by a separate strap.

When the master of the pack is ready for a ride, he throws himself upon the sledge, cracks his whip, and the dogs start wildly off with leaps and bounds.

On goes the sledge, now over a smooth sheet of frozen snow, and again bumping up and down as the dogs dash over rough hillocks of ice. It is enough to take one's breath away.

An Eskimo boy is much pleased when his father tells him he is getting old enough to have a team of dogs for his very own. He picks out the brightest and smartest one of his puppies to be the leader of the new pack and trains him with the greatest care. The young dog in his turn seems proud of the honor paid him and soon begins to rule among his fellows like a king.

Poor Eskimo dogs! They have a hard lot. All through the long winter they are seldom fed more than three or four times a week. Only the mother dogs with their puppies are allowed in the house. The rest of the pack spend most of the time outdoors although they are sometimes allowed in the passageway, or a snow hut is built for them near the house of their master. Their hair, however, is long and thick and warm, and this protects them from the winds and storm. They will stretch out on a bed of snow and sleep comfortably hour after hour in the coldest weather. One of their favorite resting places is the top of their master's hut; but when the wind blows hard they prefer to creep into their snow house and stay there till the weather is once more calm.

As soon as the Eskimo boy is old enough to hold a tiny bow his parents put one in his chubby hands. He is so pleased when he is able to set an arrow and send it speeding against a mark on the wall of the hut. When he strikes it for the first time the place rings with his shouts of delight. When he is a little older he takes lessons from his father in shaping harpoons and spearheads. He is now getting ready for the hunting that is to be his work in life.

While he is learning the ways of a hunter, his sister also has her lessons. Her mother and grandmother are busy women, tanning the skins the men bring in, and making them into warm garments for the family. The girls must therefore learn to sew with coarse bone needles and heavy thread made from the sinews of the reindeer. They must also help in chewing skin with their strong white teeth. This is to make the skin soft and comfortable for the wearer, but it is a long, hard task. Many an Eskimo woman wears her teeth down to stubs by the time she is an old woman.

After Seals.

When autumn sets in, the head of the family watches the ice in the bay. As soon as it is frozen hard enough, he will begin his hunt for seals. He clothes himself in fur from head to foot, takes his lance from the wall, and hangs over one arm a little stool made of small pieces of wood bound together with leather straps. He must not forget his hunting knife, nor a fur blanket which he throws over his shoulders. At last he is off. He walks quickly down to the edge of the bay and looks keenly about over its surface. Perhaps he decides to follow the coast for some distance, as farther along the ice seems firmer.

On he moves till he comes to a place where he can trust himself. With leaps and bounds he springs from one cake of ice to another till he reaches a place where the water of the outer bay is frozen solid. He keeps his eyes fastened on the ice. Ah! he has discovered a small hole. He thinks, "Now I have found the home of a family of seals. This is certainly their breathing place."

He spreads his fur blanket on the ice close to the hole. In the middle of it he puts his stool, and then, with lance in hand, he sits down to watch and wait.

It may be that in a short time a seal's nose will appear at this hole to get a breath of fresh air, or perhaps hours will pass before this happens.

At last the watching hunter is rewarded. He thrusts his lance suddenly down through the hole, and if he has made no mistake it has pierced the seal below. The lance disappears under the ice, but the hunter has taken care to fasten leather lines to the blunt end, and this he holds tightly in his hands.

Now he must be very careful. He takes his hunting knife from his sheath and carefully cuts away the ice from around the breathing hole. He must make a place so large that the seal's body can be drawn up through, to the surface. At last his prey lies before him but the animal is still alive and must be killed.

As soon as this is done, the man hastens back to the shore near his home where some of his faithful dogs have been harnessed to the sledge and are patiently awaiting him.

He unties the strap by which they are fastened to a rock. Then, with delighted howls, the dogs rush along with their master to the place where the dead seal is lying. It is placed on the sledge, and in a short time is in the hands of the hunter's wife, who takes off the skin and cuts up the meat for the hungry family.

Nannook, the Bear

During the long evenings the children are never tired of listening to the stories of the big white bear. It is Nannook who makes her winter home against the side of a steep cliff. Here the snow drifts about her and shuts her in from the outside world; at the same time the warm breath from her great body melts the snow next to her, leaving a small empty space. Here she sleeps and here her little cubs are born.

Sometimes the bear is caught by means of a trap which the Eskimo hunter has built of stone set up in a square. There is a small opening inside of which a piece of blubber is placed. When Nannook snaps at the blubber, down falls a heavy stone and the animal is made a prisoner.

Sometimes the hunter comes upon the track of a bear when he has no companion except his trusty dogs. But he is not afraid. He urges them on and the sledge dashes along with the greatest speed. The master of the team hardly needs to guide, for the dogs are eager to follow the scent. And now the prey is in sight. Perhaps it is a mother bear with two cubs. She sees her enemy and turns to flee, but her little ones cannot run fast and she stops again and again for them. Every moment the dogs are gaining upon her. At last she sees it is of no use and takes her stand to meet the attack.

The team is upon her now. The hunter leaps from the sledge and rushes towards the mother bear with spear in hand. She rises upon her hind legs and opens her mouth with an angry growl. One blow of her paw would be enough to kill the man if he gave her time to strike, but he makes a sudden thrust into her heart with his spear before she has a chance to do this.

It may be that the spear fails to reach its mark, or that the bear breaks it with one angry blow. She is furious now, and it would go hard with the hunter if the faithful dogs were not already springing upon the huge animal like a pack of wolves. With their help she is overcome, and falls at last dying to the ground. Then it is an easy matter to kill the poor little cubs, which all through the fight have been crying piteously.

Many a time an Eskimo hunter has met his death when on a bear hunt. Many a time, too, he has received fearful wounds that have made him a cripple for the rest of his life. Yet he is a brave man and is ever ready to join a hunt in search of Nannook, the big white bear.

After the Walrus

The Eskimo boys are not only eager for bear stories, but they love to hear their fathers tell of the battles with the big walrus, whose home is in the sea. It weighs nearly a thousand pounds. It

has a thick, tough skin, and long tusks of ivory. When a number of walruses are together they will often turn on the hunters with fury. Then the men must move quickly and fight bravely, or they may lose their lives.

The best time for a walrus hunt is when the moon is shining brightly. The children look on eagerly while the men get knives and lances ready, for perhaps news has just come that walruses have been seen on the ice floes miles away up the coast. The dogs are harnessed to the sledges and the party start off.

One, two, and even three days may pass with no sign of the returning hunters. At last the sound of barking dogs is heard in the distance. The women and children rush out of the huts, and if the moon has set or the clouds have hidden her light, they carry torches and hurry to meet the hunters.

The news may be good and the sledges loaded with ivory and walrus meat. But perhaps the men have not been successful, and have only to tell of a long search, with no prize gained. It may be that one of the men has been wounded by an enraged walrus, or has been drawn into the icy water and has narrowly escaped drowning. At any rate, there is much to tell to the eager listeners.

A walrus is much larger and heavier than a seal. Besides this, it has two strong tusks with which to defend itself; and although it is hunted in much the same way, it is far more dangerous work to kill a walrus and land it safely on the ice. One man seldom hunts walruses alone.

The Narwhal

Eskimos never live far from the shore. It would not be safe to do so, for most of their food is obtained from the sea. Besides seals and walruses, other large creatures are hunted there. There are different kinds of whales; there are porpoises and swordfish; more important still is the narwhal with its long ivory tusk pointing straight out from its head. It is an ugly-looking creature, but the Eskimos think only of the beautiful white ivory and the oil to be obtained, besides abundance of delicious meat.

As soon as November comes, the men begin to look for narwhals. A party of hunters get into their boats and paddle out into the deep waters of the bay. As they paddle along, as soon as a narwhal appears in sight they hurry toward it with all the speed possible. Each one is eager to be the first one to attack, for he is the one to receive most honor when the fight is over and the prize gained. Great care must be used as the hunters draw near the narwhal for that long tusk could make a hole through a boat in an instant.

Springtime

The long winter is over at last. The men have hunted many of the days, but they have spent much time making lines and traps for the warmer days to come; also in mending and sharpening their weapons. The women have been busy making clothes for the family and tending the lamps, while the happy, loving children have helped their parents a little, but mostly they have been coasting and playing games on the snowfields. They have paid visits to friends in other villages; they have had many a feast; sometimes, alas! they have gone without food for days at a time. They have sung and danced, and watched the beautiful northern lights flash over the sky. They have listened to legends of their big brother, the moon, and his sister the sun. Sometimes, too, they have heard stories about the great ice-sheet that stretches all over the mountains and plains of the inland country. They trembled as they were told that terrible beings have their home on that inland ice and they are quite sure they would not venture there for the world.

Now that spring has come, they are ready for a season of sunshine. They are glad, too, to seek a new home and new adventures. Yes, the spring has come and flocks of birds are flying overhead to bring the good news.

The boys help their fathers take off the roofs of the winter houses and open them up to the sunshine and fresh air. All the people in the village are going to move.

Skin tents are packed on the sledges, together with lamps and the few stone dishes they possess. For four whole months the Eskimos will camp out and move from place to place in search of reindeer and birds on the land, or fish in the waters of the bay.

Sometimes in the early spring or fall the Eskimo children live in still different homes from their winter huts of stone or the summer tents. These are the snow houses, which the men can build very quickly.

If they are off on a long hunt, these snow houses are useful, for they are warm and comfortable in the worst storm or the coldest weather. Big blocks of solid snow are cut and piled up in the shape of a bee-hive. A small doorway is left open which can be filled with another snow-block when the people wish it. When the house is finished loose snow is sifted over it and every crack filled up so that the wind cannot make its way inside. The stone lamp is set up in the middle or at the side of the hut. A bench is made of snow and covered with furs, and the family are ready to go to housekeeping.

As soon as the Eskimo children see the birds flying in the springtime they begin to think of the fun they will have hunting for eggs. The boys get their bows and arrows ready at this time, for they will shoot dozens and dozens of the birds before the summer is over.

There are many kinds of these birds, most of which like to build their nests on the sides of steep cliffs along the shore. Best of all are the eider ducks with their soft and beautiful feathers. Shirts of eider-duck skin with the feathers worn next to the body are the best and warmest of all, both for the babies of the household and their fathers.

An Eskimo hunter will climb up the sides of the steepest cliff in his search for birds' eggs. If he lose his foothold, he may fall a great distance and be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. But he does not seem to think of danger. His one idea is to get something good on which his family and himself may feast.

The Skin-boat, or Kayak

The boats of the Eskimos are called kayaks and are like no others in the world. The boys take many lessons before they can be trusted to help in making a kayak. It is long and narrow and has room for only one person. Its frame is of bone or wood and it is pointed at both ends. When it is finished, the boat-maker stretches over it a seal skin which his wife has tanned. It is an excellent covering, for the water cannot pass through it. In the middle of the top the man leaves an opening as large as his body is round. He steps inside and sits down, stretching his legs in front of him. Yes, the opening is of the right size; the water of the wildest sea cannot enter and sink the boat when once the Eskimo has fitted the rim around the bottom of his coat over the rim he has made about the opening in the skin covering. With his stout paddle he will dare to travel for miles over the rough sea.

The short summer-time is one long day, for the sun does not set. The children go to bed when they are tired and sleepy and get up when they please. They feast to their hearts' content during this time, for there are usually fish and birds and eggs in plenty. Then, too, these children of the north go berrying and bring home many a dish of delicious black crow-berries.

The greatest dainty of all is the paunch of a reindeer's stomach. It consists of the moss and shrubs the animal has eaten, and is a little acid. It is no wonder then that the Eskimos are fond of it, as they have neither bread nor vegetables, and no fruit except the berries they are able to pick during a few weeks out of each year.

The Reindeer

As soon as the spring opens the older boys look forward to the hunt. Perhaps a herd of reindeer has been seen not far away, and the hunters start out over the fields still well-covered with snow to look for traces of them. They carry bows and arrows, also knives. They must not forget to take fur soles for their feet, too. As soon as they are within range of their game they will bind these soles under their kamiks so that the reindeer cannot hear them as they draw near.

Even now the herd may take fright while the hunters are still too far off to shoot. Then thud, thud, sound their feet as they scud away over the fields. But the hunters will not despair even then. They will give chase for hours together if it be necessary.

Sometimes the keen eyes of the Eskimos will find only prints on the snow to show that a herd of reindeer has been lately feeding there.

“We will stay here and watch for them to return,” they say to each other. Then they go to work to make a little fort of stones, behind which they sit down to watch and wait.

They may have to stay there a long time before the sound of reindeer hoofs is heard, but they are patient. They amuse each other with story-telling and the hours pass quickly.

At last a herd draws near. The antlers of these Arctic reindeer are broad and branching. They plant their short legs firmly on the ground as, with heads bent down, they search for moss beneath the snow. They seem to know just where to paw away the snow to find the food they love.

The right moment comes and the hunters send their arrows flying into the midst of the herd. One of the reindeer falls to the ground while the others dash wildly away.

When a number of animals have been killed in a hunt and there is too much meat to carry at once, some of it is buried under a pile of stones, so that the wolves and foxes cannot get it. Then the hunters trudge home for the dog team to help them.

New Settlers

You remember that Eric the Red went to live in Greenland before a white person had stepped on the mainland of North America. You also have learned that his followers lived in Greenland for a long time and then disappeared shortly after they met with the Eskimos.

From that time no more white people went to Greenland till the year 1585, when an Englishman named Davis sailed for many miles along its coast and visited among the Eskimos. Then he went away.

After his visit, there were no settlers from other lands for nearly a hundred years. Then a good minister in Denmark left home with his wife and children and went to a place in southwestern Greenland which he called God Havn or, Good Haven. Hans Egede, for this was the minister's name, wished to teach the Eskimos the Christian religion.

He had hard work before him. A long time passed before he could understand the strange words of the Eskimo language and the only way he could teach the people was by the pictures he brought with him. Yet he stayed in Greenland for many years and his own children grew up with the little Eskimos for playmates.

Then Hans Egede's wife died and he went back to Denmark. By this time, however, he had a grown-up son who loved the work his father had begun. He said, “I will remain here and keep on with your teaching.”

So he stayed. Other people from Denmark joined him, and now there are several settlements of Danes in Greenland. They have brought lumber with them with which to build their houses, as well as furniture and dishes from their old home across the sea. Even the sound of the piano may be heard now in this frozen land of the north. Tiny gardens have been dug where a few vegetables are

raised each summer. Best of all, churches have been built where Eskimo children sit side by side with their fair-haired brothers and sisters of Denmark.

Once in a while a ship draws near bringing papers and letters, canned food and clothing from across the sea. It is a time of great excitement for the settlers. They have been getting ready for the coming of the ship for a long time, filling vessels with oil and fish, and packing the furs they have got in barter from the Eskimos. All these things are to be sold in other lands, besides many tons of cryolite which is very useful in making aluminum. The white settlers get it from a large mine and receive a good price for it, since Greenland and one other country are the only places in the world where it can be obtained.

Although the Eskimo children of southern Greenland have white playmates among them, yet above them in the north there is many a little village where people from other lands have never been seen or even heard of.

CHAPTER III

Little Folks of Alaska

The Coming of Behring

Close your hand together tightly, leaving the forefinger pointing straight out. You now have before you the general shape of the peninsula of Alaska, which lies in the northwestern part of North America.

The children of Alaska have a much more comfortable home than the little Greenlanders. Their shores, except in the far north, are not bound in ice the year around; the winters are not so cold and the summers are warmer; trees grow in thick forests over a great part of the country, and many flowers bloom there.

The reason for this is, that warm winds blow over the country from the west, and these winds are due to a broad stream of water flowing through the Pacific ocean, called the Japanese current. It makes its way from the south and keeps its warmth during its long journey through the colder waters of the main ocean. And so it is that the children of Alaska who feel the warm winds blowing eastward from the Japanese current, do not need the heavy furs worn by the Greenlanders, neither do they require as much fat meat to give heat to their bodies, nor as close and stuffy homes to live in.

The boys and girls of Alaska belong to several different races. There are the yellow-skinned Eskimos of the far north and west; there are the copper-colored Indians who are found in the south, and along the banks of the rivers of the inland country; there are the Aleuts, who live on a chain of islands stretching westward towards Asia, and who are like Indians in some ways and like the Japanese in others. No one really knows what these Aleuts are, nor where they came from. Perhaps in the long-ago they made their way to these islands from Asia, for the distance is not great, and small boats could have crossed over safely in good weather. Besides these Aleuts and the Indians and Japanese, there are white children from the United States whose fathers are busy trading for furs or digging gold in the mines.

Early in the eighteenth century, a brave seaman named Vitus Behring was sailing under the orders of Peter the Great of Russia. He crossed the Pacific ocean from Asia and traveled far into the north. He passed through a strait and entered a sea, both of which were named in his honor, Behring. Then he coasted along the shores of a land whose mountains often rose up out of the ocean. He was the first white man to look on the peninsula of Alaska.

A dreadful storm arose during this voyage and Vitus Behring and his men were wrecked on a small island to which also the name of the commander was given. Here he died, and here his men built a vessel out of what they saved from the wreck, and sailed away for home to tell of what had been discovered.

Time went by and other Russian ships visited Alaska and began to trade with the natives for the furs which they got from the wild animals roaming through the country. After a while they built small stations here and there on the coast, for the purpose of trading, and to these stations ships came regularly to receive loads of seal and fox, beaver and martin skins which the Indians and the Eskimos were glad to trap and kill, when they found they could get bright-colored blankets, tobacco, and many other things in exchange for them.

In this way it came about that a few Russian children with blue eyes and yellow hair found their way to Alaska, and lived in rough log houses with wild-looking Indians and Eskimos for their neighbors. About fifty years ago the children of the United States began to hear many stories of

Alaska. Their parents told them that Russian fur-traders had made fortunes there. Moreover, Russia was willing to sell the country for a few million dollars.

Some people said, “Why should not Americans buy it? Besides the valuable furs, there are rich forests in Alaska.”

At this time a statesman by the name of Seward was urging the United States to purchase that far-away peninsula, for he was quite sure this country would be well repaid for doing so. People listened to his reasons, and at last they decided to follow Mr. Seward’s advice, and Russian America, as it had been called up to that time, received its new name of Alaska, and became a territory of the United States. There were many, however, who thought it a most foolish purchase and often spoke of it as “Seward’s folly.” To-day everyone looks upon it, instead, as “Seward’s wisdom,” for it has made many an American child’s father rich, not only through its furs, but also through the salmon caught in its waters and the gold found in its mines.

The Little Eskimos

Along the northern and western shores of Alaska, in the coldest part of the country, are scattered villages of the Eskimos. They are much like their brothers and sisters of Greenland. They dress in furs, and live chiefly on the fat meat of the seal and walrus. They seldom go far from the shore, because most of their food is obtained from the sea.

Their winter homes are small stone huts built partly underground, and with long tunnel-like entrances dug out of the earth and leading down into them. Turf and mud are plastered over the cone-shaped roofs, while in the middle, at the top of each, there is a small opening to let out the smoke. Directly under this opening is the family fireplace where wood is burnt except in the most northern homes. There the Eskimo children help their mothers tend just such lamps of seal-oil as the Greenlanders use, since it is too cold for trees to grow on the frozen marshes that stretch along the shores of the Arctic ocean. Oil is the one thing that they can obtain, and of this they must make use. In the short summer the little Eskimos of Alaska delight in the skin tents which their mothers stretch over light frames, while from time to time, during the spring and fall, they camp out in snow-houses.

They have their teams of dogs, which they pet and train. They have their skin-covered kayaks made in much the same way as those of the Greenland Eskimos, although it is very probable that they have never heard of their relations in that distant island. Mother Nature has provided certain things to maintain life in the frozen lands of the north, – not many to be sure; but the minds of those who dwell in places far distant from each other seem to have thought out much the same way of using them.

In these far northern regions the little Eskimos are often treated to a most beautiful sight. It is the northern lights, which flash over the heavens during the long cold winter nights, and are far brighter than are ever seen in Greenland or Iceland. Think of the most glorious rainbow you can imagine, – the brilliant green, yellow, blue, and violet spreading out in great waves of light over the sky. For a few moments it is as light as day. Then the colors fade away and all is darkness once more. It is not strange that the little Eskimos who stand watching are filled anew with wonder and think of it as the work of great and powerful spirits.

Among the Indians

Along the southern shores of Alaska and on the banks of the rivers of the inland country are many Indian villages. They belong to several different tribes, but their way of living is much the same. Their huts are generally built of logs and bark, and they like best to dress in the bright-colored blankets, with red and yellow handkerchiefs on their heads, which they get in barter from the white traders. The red children have broad faces, black eyes, and black hair. Long ago, before the white men lived among them, these little Indians believed that they could make themselves more beautiful by

tattooing their bodies. As these poor children grew up, they suffered many an hour of pain while the red or blue lines were marked on their chins by threads drawn along under the skin. Now, however, as the red men learn more and more of the ways of the white people, this cruel fashion is passing away. Many of the little Indians of Alaska go to school, where they take delight in learning to read and write. They are rather slow, but they are very patient, and proud indeed are they when they have mastered a hard lesson.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.