INTRODUCTION

PURSUING the original plan of this work to include those native tribes of the United States, the Dominion of Canada, and Alaska, which still retain such of their aboriginal customs and beliefs as to make them worthy of special treatment, the study of the primitive peoples of this vast territory was brought to a close after a summer spent among the Eskimo of the Alaskan islands, coast, and inland waterways, in 1927.

Although it was not the intention to project the research to include every phase of Eskimo culture, which indeed extends from eastern Greenland to Siberia over a coastal strip exceeding five thousand miles, a glimpse of the general features of that culture may be had from the results of the observations in the territory immediately covered, namely, from the Aleutian islands to Point Barrow, a region occupied by the northwesternmost aboriginal inhabitants of the New World. The distance between the continents is not great: indeed from the Eskimo village of Kíngegán, at Cape Prince of Wales, to the Siberian coast one may, on a clear day, discern the faint outline of the Asian shore.

The Eskimo of this area, by virtue of the physiography of their domain, gain their livelihood chiefly from the sea, although during half of the year they suffer the usual rigors of the arctic winter, with little opportunity to obtain food from either land or water. With the coming of temperate weather, however, and the breaking-up of the great ice-fields, they go forth in their skin craft in quest of the food so long needed, buffeted constantly by sweeping gales and the treacherous, shifting, grinding ice-packs. None but the most expert canoemen could survive the stress of these arctic conditions, let alone the acquirement of food in the face of every difficulty. The oft-repeated narratives of hunters who put out to sea in their frail skin kaiaks, never to return, afford one a faint idea of some of the vicissitudes of Eskimo food-seekers in a lone and inhospitable region.

Only the fittest, indeed, in such an environment could survive. Yet, while many of the Eskimo visited and studied by the writer still retain much of their hardihood, they appear to have lost not a little of the vigor observed during his study of the coast Eskimo thirty years ago. As among so many primitive people, contact with whites and the acquirement of their diseases have worked a tragic change during this period. A notable exception was found in the natives of Nunivak is-

land, whose almost total freedom from Caucasian contact has thus far been their salvation; and yet within a year of the writer's visit it was officially reported that the population decreased nearly thirty percent. In all the author's experience among Indians and Eskimo, he never knew a happier or more thoroughly honest and self-reliant people.

A characteristic of the Eskimo, which the student can not fail to observe, is his ready adaptability, even to the extent of desiring at once to assimilate, at least outwardly, the manners of the white men about him. In this respect the Eskimo stands in strong contrast to the average Indian, whose attitude, evidently because of the distrust he has learned to engender toward the whites, is that of contempt.

It can only be regretted that the descriptive text and the illustrations in this volume depict only the summer life of the Eskimo herein treated; but it was not possible, owing to the writer's state of health, to spend a winter at one of the isolated villages for the purpose of studying and picturing the winter life of its inhabitants. Throughout the work, including the preparation of the text, he has had the enthusiastic aid and cooperation of Mr. Stewart C. Eastwood.

In this Introduction to the concluding volume of the series, the author recalls, with a sense-of deep gratitude, those friends whose sympathetic interest made the inception of the work possible. Early in the history of the task the keen interest of Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan was at once manifested when the opportunity was offered to present the plan and scope of the volumes and to exhibit some of the illustrations. Ever appreciative not alone of the esthetic, but imbued with a deep appreciation of everything tending to increase and disseminate knowledge, as so well exemplified by his constant patronage of scientific investigation and the accumulation of treasures in literature, art, and history, Mr. Morgan afforded much of the means for carrying on the work of which these twenty volumes of THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN are the result. The author will not attempt to say more in appreciation of Mr. Morgan's generous interest, which was duly noted in Volume IX, published soon after the passing of this beneficent patron. He must make this the opportunity, however, of saying that, save for Mr. Morgan's encouragement and support the work probably could not have been completed; and it is extremely doubtful that if his son, the present J. Pierpont Morgan, had not inherited the father's love of the beautiful and that high sentiment from which arose the desire to

bring the undertaking to completion, the volumes could hardly have been finished in their present attractive form.

In bringing to a close this result of thirty years of research the writer wishes also to record an expression of his gratitude to those other friends who offered every encouragement during the formative period of the work and who never lost faith in its ultimate fruition. Mere thanks seem hollow in comparison with such loyal coöperation; but great is the satisfaction the writer enjoys when he can at last say to all those whose faith has been unbounded, "It is finished."

EDWARD S. CURTIS