THE NOATAK

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

NEARLY a week's journey by skin boat up the swift, shallow Noatak river, which empties into the narrow strait connecting Hotham inlet with Kotzebue sound, is situated the winter village of the Noatak people. The little settlement nestles picturesquely in a grove of spruce on a high bluff overlooking the stream, which is wide at this point.

These villagers dwell in small log cabins, each containing a single room with bunks built against a side and rear wall. Light and ventilation are obtained through the usual smoke-hole covered with intestinal parchment. Stone and clay lamps and Swedish oil stoves serve both for cooking and for heating. Entrance to the room is gained through a small room, a shed, which is used for storing nets, snowshoes, sleds, and weapons. This storeroom serves the purpose also of a storm-door throughout the winter. Both room and shed are roofed with a covering of timber splits overlaid with earth and sod. Near the houses are circular dog corrals of slightly spaced spruce palings, and caches, either platforms or small sheds, erected on stilts.

It is said that the present village, with its log houses, is of comparatively recent origin; that in former days the main settlement, with dugout houses, was near some inland lakes. At that time many families lived alone in dwellings scattered along the river. The territory occupied by them formerly, as well as recently, lies between the coast and the Noatak river, which extends in a general northwardly direction, and to the south and east from the Noatak to a line about halfway between Noatak and Kobuk rivers. There the territory of the Kobuk people begins. The relations between the two are peaceful and friendly, though there have been wars in the past. When Kobuk and Noatak meet along this common ground, they often hunt together. In winter the Kobuk used to make journeys to the Noatak by dog-team to trade birch-bark and tobacco for caribou hides and furs or sealskins. A few of the more venturesome trapped fox and hunted caribou far to the northeast, even extending their journeys to the Meade River country south of Point Barrow, there trading with the local inhabitants for fox- and wolverene-furs, seal-and whale-oil, in return for tobacco and caribou-hides.

In midwinter some of the most courageous families undertake a truly remarkable journey overland from the Noatak river to the sea and down the coast to Sheshalik in order to arrive in season for the early seal-hunting. Not only is regular equipment for the trail carried, but the hunters haul their large and burdensome umiaks by means of dog-teams. The progress is necessarily slow, involving hunting for food as well as prodigious labor in moving their burdens. The difficulties of the trek are by no means lessened, in the crossing of a mountain range, by the intense cold and the winter storms.

In spring, while the ice is still breaking up, the hunters kill ducks along the river, for many varieties are migrating from the south at that time. Later, when the river is free of ice, the muskrat season begins, and hundreds of these small rodents furnish both food and furs for garments. Following this, the remainder of the Noatak move by skin boats, umiak and kaiak, down the river to its mouth, where they pitch their spring and summer camps on Sheshalik (Sisálik) peninsula across the strait from the Kotzebue settlement. Here they hunt beluga and seal, and set out fish-nets. In former times, when the village was farther inland, near the lakes, the people rarely came down the river. Then their chief means of support was the caribou, which furnished food, skins for clothing and for kaiak-covers, bone for knives, scrapers, spear-points, and arrow-points, horn for spoons, and sinew for thread. These products were traded for sealskins and seal-oil, as well as for blubber and oil of the whale.

As the people journey downstream, the hunters extend along each bank to shoot whatever caribou may be seen. At Sheshalik the hunters harpoon seal from kaiaks. These boats are not the deep-draft, broad-beamed, seaworthy craft such as are found farther south, but extremely narrow, shallow, skin boats designed for the smooth river waters and for muskrat-hunting on the reedy lagoons. Skill and dexterity are required in the management of these kaiaks, and even the best paddlers sometimes capsize, especially in the excitement of the hunt when they tend to dig the paddle too deep in the water. The double-bladed paddle serves also as a balancing pole. These craft, also used by the Selawik, Kobuk, and Kotzebue peoples, have thin, rakish lines. The forward deck inclines gradually from bow to manhole, thus affording some protection to the paddler from spray and waves.

Beluga are sometimes killed by spearing in deep water with the

heavy flint-headed spear from skin boats, umiaks with a crew of from ten to fifteen, which then tow the body ashore; but the general custom, when one or more of the animals are seen, is to surround them on the seaward side with a line of kaiaks, and with noise and splashing drive them into shallow water near shore. They soon run aground, and in this helpless position are easily speared and killed. Women are not allowed to touch a carcass previous to cutting up. The successful hunter, or the one first spearing, places a piece of the skin on a pole which he sets up before the camp. Other beluga seeing this, it is believed, will know that the hunters properly treat the bodies, so that the beluga-spirits may return to the sea; hence they will allow themselves to be killed. This belief, and the harm resulting from failure to carry out the customary procedure, is illustrated in a Kobuk legend. All the women help in the cutting up of the meat, whether or not their husbands had cast spears or made kills. During and after butchering no one may sleep for a day and a night, and before sleeping the pole with the skin must be taken down. Fishing with gill-nets and seines takes place during the summer.

Diomede and Cape Prince of Wales people visit the Noatak here during the summer, bringing walrus skins and meat, whale blubber and oil, to trade for the furs of inland animals. Walrus herds do not appear near Sheshalik. Near the close of summer the Noatak move across the strait to Kotzebue, where more trading, feasting, and story-telling take place. Then before winter sets in, skin boats and kaiaks are loaded with the summer's catch, household belongings, tents, women, children, and dogs, and the traders commence the journey back to the village. Along the lower reaches of the stream, progress is rapid, sails — latten, lug, and leg-of-mutton — are raised in a favorable breeze, and the boats, heavily laden as they are, skim along at good speed. But the greater portion of their progress is obtained by hard labor. The river is shallow, filled with gravel bars, and exceedingly swift. The vast, smooth, inclined plane of the terrain causes the stream to change course from year to year. Progress here is slow. The stream must be crossed often from bar to bar, accomplished by sail and paddle, and ground is lost in the transit. Along the bars and banks, dog-teams on long tow-lines driven by men, boys, and girls, who also pull on the line, drag the boat against the current. The women remain in the boats and aid by steering, poling, and paddling. In the swiftest reaches, several

dog-teams and the able-bodied of the group pull up the boats one by one. While the people travel together, it is by groups rather than as a whole, for some leave Kotzebue earlier than others. At night the groups camp on convenient gravel bars. The people are not daunted by this arduous labor, but laugh, joke, and make merry over any slight accident or mishap. Arrived at the village, they do not at once move into winter quarters, but camp on the shore below the bluffs, setting out fish-nets.

In former days many of the families, which had spent the summer in fishing along the river, at this season moved upstream as far as they could go by boat and kaiak. They then went overland to a lake to hunt caribou. Some hunted with bows; but when herds were sighted, it was customary to stampede them into the lake, driving the frightened animals between two long lines of people and killing them while in the water. Sometimes the herds were driven into the river or over steep bluffs. Those families coming up the river later, went to meet the hunters and help carry back the game, the last to arrive bringing dog-teams, because snow would then be on the ground. In return for the transportation, the hunters shared the meat. After the freeze-up, when herds were located, the hunters built circular enclosures or corrals of willow, with a wide entrance. On the opposite sides they set strong sinew snares in openings. The herd was driven slowly through the entrance, between two lines of people, and the caribou were caught in the snares while trying to break through. Those not snared were speared. The meat was then cut up and brought home by dog-team; or if the place seemed good for future winter hunting caches, circular willow frames, covered with moss and roofed with sod, were erected, and half of the meat was stored there for future use. Sometimes a hunter, or perhaps several hunters, would erect a dwelling and winter there, rounding up caribou whenever seen. At the present time, the necessity for caribou-hunting is past, because the village owns a reindeer herd which furnishes meat and skins.

During the winter, ptarmigan are caught in nets, stretched high so that the birds will fly into them. Snares and large meshed nets are set amongst willows for rabbits. The making of sinew nets, and more recently nets of cotton cord, for fish; the tanning of hides and making of clothing; and the manufacture of new kaiak-frames, weapons, and utensils, are occupations for the long winter nights. Pots were made

of wood, the hollowed-out trunks of small trees; cooking was accomplished by raising water to boiling point with heated stones. Another kind of pot was made of clay mixed with ptarmigan-feathers as a binder. The wet clay was first kneaded into a ball with the fingers, and then the feathers were mixed in. The mass was next rolled out and shaped inside a willow frame, but at this stage the prospective vessel was without a bottom. The clay cylinder was then set on edge around a small fire to dry and harden. Finally, the bottom of still wet clay was set in place and the whole thoroughly rubbed with seal-oil. After being soaked again in water, it was set in a fire to dry and bake.

MYTHOLOGY

ORIGIN OF THE MESSENGER FEAST[1]

Sámik, a hunter, lived in the interior of Kaiyóruk, subsisting mainly on venison, using the fat for oil. Early one summer, at a time when caribou-fur was at its best, he found a herd at sunrise. As he stalked, crawling, a large Eagle snatched him up in the sky and flew toward the sea. Sámik thrust upward many times with his spear. With each thrust, blood spurted upon him, and soon the Eagle was dead. As they floated down, and it appeared as though they would fall into the sea, Sámik thought, "If we drop in the water, our bodies will be lost; but if we strike land, our bones will be found."

When the bird glided toward land, Sámik thought, "If we land near my village, some one will find our bones."

As they neared earth, Sámik knew that if the bird fell on top of him, he would be killed. Just as he pried open the great talons and swung to one side, bird and man landed heavily. When Sámik came to his senses, one cheek was in a pool of water. He arose, skinned the bird, and took it home. The hide, large as a walrus-skin, he spread, dried, and stored away in a wooden box. Each sunny day he aired the skin and smoothed the feathers. Sámik had a premonition that another Eagle might catch him, so he was very cautious; but as time went on and no Eagle appeared, he relaxed his watch. He was now more than ever successful in hunting.

1 Compare the Kotzebue legend of the Messenger feast.

Another time, stalking a herd, he was snatched suddenly into the sky. As he was about to spear, the huge Eagle begged: "Do not kill me! My parents have sent me for you, but I shall carry you back safely. Nothing will happen to you."

The bird flew so high that Sámik could see two large bodies of water. Then land disappeared, and they flew through a hole in the sky to another lighter, more beautiful land. Ahead was a large house. As they approached, the man was frightened to hear a loud, irregular pulsing, as of a huge drum. Eagle said: "Do not be frightened. That is the beating of my mother's heart. She is mourning for my brother."

They alighted on a cache, where were two eagle-skins. The bird took off his skin, and they went inside the house, where the aged parents sat. The father addressed Sámik: "I sent my younger son for you, because my wife is mourning for her dead son and her heart is getting worse. We saw how careful you were with the skin of our son whom you killed, and we are glad, but we could not get him back. You can return him by holding a dance. First make a drum to sound like my wife's heart. Then hold a dance for four days, and afterward burn the drum and our son's skin. Then you will have nothing to fear from us. The dance will be called *Níliga."*

On returning home, he began to follow instructions. He tried many ways to make a drum to sound like the old woman's heart; but none gave the right tone. One, a wooden bowl placed bottom-side up in a tub of water, was good; but because the water would freeze in winter, when the dance was to be held, he discarded the drum. Finally, he made a wooden box and headed it with a fox-skin. The skin was painted red and had a black border painted on it to represent the Sawtooth mountains. All summer the man gathered food and furs.

In the winter, Sámik invited the village to his home. In the rear of the room he hung the eagle-skin. Below it were seated the singers, and before them Sámik placed an old man to drum, giving him a horn beater. For three days, morning and evening, the dancers, wearing long mittens, headbands with feathers, and shaking horn rattles, danced. On the third evening, after a certain song, four dancers wearing walrus-heads went into the entranceway. Above the entrance Sámik had placed a board with four openings to represent wolf-holes. Because Sámik was a land hunter, all the things he used had to be in keeping with the land. The wolf dancers stuck heads through the holes, peered about slyly,

then jumped into the room and danced.

On the fourth day Sámik gathered all the dance equipment he had used, including the eagle-skin, and burnt it behind his home. Afterward he became a mighty hunter. He told the people to keep up the dance in remembrance of him. The people did as he wished, later one village inviting another, until the present day. The dance is now the Messenger feast.

THE FOUR WOLF-SPIRITS

A wealthy man, a good hunter, mourned long for his lost wife. Each day he sat idle at home, lamenting and wailing. His wife had failed to return when she had taken a sled to bring home his game. In his search he had gone to all nearby villages, but there was no trace of her anywhere.

Close by lived a poor woman with her son who had often been taken care of and fed by the missing wife. Continually they talked in this strain, the son asking: "How are we to live, if the hunter's wife does not return? She has been the only one to feed us; without her we shall starve."

The old woman always answered: "I can not tell him where to find her, because I do not know where she is. We can not help him."

One day the old woman commanded her son, "Go to that hunter and bring him here!"

The youth went to the man's house, but was afraid to enter. Returning home, his mother scolded him for not obeying. When he went a second time, and entered, the man kept his face averted and said nothing. At the door the youth called, "My mother wants to see you!"

Out of curiosity the hunter came to the old woman. She expressed great pity for him, and offered help. She advised: "A good hunter like you must have some powerful talisman to bring home so much meat. Now make a walking-stick and fasten your charm on the end of it. Perhaps you will find your wife. Stand the stick upright at night behind your house. Next morning see if it is leaning. Go in the direction toward which it leans and you will find your wife."

The hunter made a walking-stick and tied on it a bag containing a hawk-skin. He talked in this wise to his power: "You are a bird. You may know where my wife went. You hawks are the fastest of birds, and travel far. You should know when my wife left and where she

went."

In the morning, when he found the stick leaning toward inland mountains, he dressed for travel, made a pack, and set out. At sunset he built a snow-house and set up the stick behind it. To the power he said: "You know where my wife is and will direct me to her. We shall find her."

In the morning the walking-stick leaned a little more toward the interior. Many days the man walked, building a snow-house each evening, and each morning finding the walking-stick leaning closer to the ground. Finally he discovered it lying flat, and knew that he was near his destination. Late in the afternoon he saw a large house on the distant side of a hill. The thought came to him: "My wife must be there. If I only can see her, I shall be glad, even though I lose my life."

He placed his weapons in the entranceway and went inside. There were an old couple and his wife, who wept violently on seeing him. The old man spoke: "I used to tell my sons never to bother with other people. My sons always find what they go out for. If I lost my wife, I should seek her, even as you have done. That is why I always taught my sons not to touch other people's property. My sons are now hunting, but when they return, they will not kill you. They will let you take your wife away."

When the sons entered, the old man said: "This is my eldest son, Owérarok, a good hunter and fast runner. See! He has a long string of caribou-tongues on his shoulder. This other is my youngest son, Náhroaluk, almost as good a hunter, but he has not so many caribou-tongues."

After eating, the old man addressed his sons: "I always told you not to bother humans, because they are not all alike. Humans often have a supernatural power to help them in finding things." To the hunter he warned: "You may take this woman, for she does not belong to my sons; she is your wife. My sons regret to see her leave, because she is so industrious. But next year my sons will take her again. After you leave us in the morning, look back at us."

After man and wife had left, they glanced back and were astonished to see four Wolves standing by the house. After a long journey, staying each night at one of the snow-houses the hunter had built, they arrived home, and were happy all spring and summer. As winter approached, the hunter bethought himself of the old man's words. He

knew the Wolves would return for his wife. As the time drew near, he worried and planned how to thwart them.

He called together all the people and medicine-men, great and weak, and one old man who by his powers could see and hear for a long distance. He stationed men with bows in the entranceway to shoot the Wolves when they came. Should they get past these, he had men lay snares around the entrance hole and stand by them. Inside were men with bows. His wife he concealed in the hollowed-out centre-post. They all remained in his house, eating his food and waiting for the Wolves. Some thought the Wolves would come from the sea; others, from the interior.

One night, when there was a full moon, and on the anniversary of the day when his wife had been stolen, the old man with far vision and hearing suddenly announced: "You medicine-men have sung for many nights, but I have not seen or heard anything. Now I see the Wolves leaving their home. They are coming this way. They are descending from the sky, for I can not hear their steps. Let two men go out, look at the moon, and see if any one is coming."

The two men were sent out, not once, but several times, and saw nothing. On the fourth watching they reported four Wolf people walking toward them, between moon and earth. The old man continued: "I can hear them plainly. They are nearer. Now they are very close. They are at the entrance. The Wolves have passed the bowmen, who are powerless to draw string. They are coming up the entrance hole."

The hunter ordered: "They have passed our guards. Let the snaremen and bowmen inside make ready."

The four Wolves, old couple and two sons, came through the hole. The men with snares and bows stared as if turned to stone. The Wolf persons called out their names and circled the room twice. Then the father pointed at the hollow centre-pole. The hunter's wife walked through it and joined the Wolves. All circled the room once, and went out. The men, suddenly released from their spell, rushed in pursuit. Outside they could see the four Wolf people and the woman going up into the sky. In despair and rage the hunter shot arrows, the people cast spears, and the bowmen released shafts, but all fell short. Neither the Wolves nor the woman were ever seen again.

SUN-MAN

During the summer seasons a family consisting of parents and daughter moved far upstream. The father instructed his daughter: "You must go out to pick berries every morning; but if you should ever find a baby

while wandering, do not touch it."

After many days of picking, she was greatly surprised to hear wailing and crying, the sounds coming from beneath some berry-vines. Bending, she curiously peered under the vines and there saw an infant. Disobeying her father's instructions, she picked up the babe and played with it all day. Then she carried it home. Her father, very wroth, scolded: "You are too young to have a baby. I shall not provide for it. I shall not give any skins for its clothing."

The girl obtained furs from her mother and made an outfit of clothes. Throughout the summer she took care of the child and taught it to talk. But the infant cried continually when inside the house, except while in the girl's arms. One winter night, greatly disturbed and angered by the crying and shrieking, the man put the baby outside. The girl, going out when the family were asleep, comforted the child and promised it a sled-ride in the morning if it would be quiet.

While preparing to go out in the sled the next day, the girl chanced to look up and saw a man and dog-team coming down from the sun. She ran inside and told her father. The whole family were so frightened that they remained huddled by the fire, not daring to go out. Soon they heard a noise by the entrance, and the Sun-man, young and well dressed, came in.

He first inquired of the girl concerning his son; then he thanked her for taking care of the baby, well pleased to see how fine and healthy it looked. He asked the girl to marry him. After two days with his new wife, he departed, saying that he would return the following year. When in a year's time Sun-man came back and told his father-in-law that he intended to take his wife and child to the sun, the father sullenly replied: "Take her if you like! She never would obey me!"

Early in the morning they left, going straight toward the sun. As they reached it, all was dark, but after passing through the entrance, the little group came into a light country. While the father and son went to drink from a pond, a poorly dressed woman came up to the waiting girl. She asked for the girl's parka, but was refused. After insistent begging, the young woman yielded and the two exchanged garments. The strange woman then took on the form and features of the girl, while the young woman herself shrunk gradually until she was very tiny. She turned into a louse.

The man returned, and they went away, he unaware of the ex-

change of women. His own wife cried out, but her voice was so small and weak as to be unheard. After travelling all day, the family reached the village. All the people were out to welcome them, because once before a Sun-man had brought home a beautiful wife from the earth, but after close scrutiny the people jeered and ridiculed this woman.

The man, angry at this unexpected reception, stamped into the house, followed by his family. In silence he ate, and as silently went to bed. Uninvited, the false wife crawled in beside him. The man became very much amazed at the tossing, turning, and restlessness of his supposed wife. His wife had never before acted in such a manner. When he seized her to make her quiet, she thrust her head under the furs, begging him not to touch or to look at her neck and back. The man knew that something strange had happened. He even offered to search her head for possible lice which might be annoying her, but she refused. In his anger, he accused her of smelling strongly; she answered that she had worked hard and had perspired.

Meanwhile his real wife, heartbroken, continued to live as a louse. Although very tiny, she noticed that caribou never stepped on her, but avoided her. One day in her misery she cast herself beneath the hoof of a caribou-bull. She burst with a loud pop! Then the girl stood up, human again but naked. She soon wove a grass parka and put up a willow house. With a sharp flint she skinned and cut up a dead caribou found near her house. Each morning she discovered a dead caribou near by. Thus meat was abundant, and the skins she fashioned into clothing for herself, husband, and boy. The girl planned to journey soon to find her family.

One day her husband, hunting far from home, spied a house which he had never seen before. Curiously he approached, and entered. He discovered a girl who looked identically like his wife. She exclaimed, "I have made these clothes for you, my husband, and the boy!" The man was astounded, but readily believed the story she related. He knew now that the other woman was an impostor.

They went to the village, where he seized the false wife, grasped her hair, and twisted her head around until he could see her neck and back. She was crawling with lice. He caused a huge fire to be built, and burned the false woman. After that time the villagers welcomed the girl and brought many gifts to her. Husband and wife often visited the parents on earth.

THE FISHERMAN

A man and wife who dwelled in a permanent fishing camp with several other families were overtaken by a long period of ill fortune. Because his hooks were always empty, though his neighbors obtained a good catch daily, he and his wife faced starvation. Thinking that there must be some reason for the continual failure, the man decided to go out at night, make a new hole in the ice, and meanwhile watch the old one.

When the moon was waning, the luckless fisherman saw two strangers approach the old hole and lower a bag in the water, one telling the other: "We had better not catch too many. It is a long pack home."

The man, curious to see what these strangers were doing at his fishing hole, clattered noisily toward them on his snowshoes. The two heard, and looked up. One exclaimed angrily, "I shall

swallow this curious one!"

"I shall eat this rash one!" growled his companion.

Disregarding these threats, the man still kept on, but when he reached the hole the strangers suddenly vanished. Surprised, he looked about. He was alone, save for a bag of fish lying by the hole. Then he quickly packed up and started toward his home. His wife, waiting as usual by the trail through the willows, was greatly surprised to see the bag of fish. It had been long since her husband had brought home a catch. He lied, "With my own hands have I caught them, but we must not eat frozen fish until tomorrow, because something might happen."

In those days it was forbidden to consume fish on the day they were caught. But the couple were so starved that they were unable to resist the temptation, so they feasted well and long that same night. Every night the fisherman was successful in obtaining a large catch at the old hole.

Later, when the days became longer, the man found a snow-house on one of his trips up the river. It was empty save for some fish-hooks and frozen fish, which he took home with him. On his way, finding the burden too great, he flung the fish into open water. In front of his house was a strange sled, and two pairs of snowshoes by the door. Before going inside, he carried away and hid the two ptarmigan which he saw on the sled. His visitors were an old man and woman. After eating, these two refused fish and accepted only meat. They all sat up late,

telling stories. When all were asleep, the man arose and hung his fish-hooks outside the door. He whispered to his wife: "Let these strangers arise first in the morning. We shall remain in bed."

The strangers went out in the morning, departing without a word, while the man and his wife slept. They were never seen again.

The wife, going outside, called back, "Why, there are fish-hooks here that I have never seen before! "

"Those are my new hooks which I hung up last night."

"There are fresh fish on them."

The man knew that his visitors had been Fish-people. They had refused to eat fish, taking only meat. At night, after a day's hunt, the man again hung up his hooks. Again he told his wife to stay in bed late in the morning. They heard, as they lay there, the two sons o their neighbor go out hunting. All that day and the next night the two young men remained away. On the following morning, the anxious mother, going outside to watch for her boys, in dismay and sorrow saw the two bodies hanging from the fish-hooks of their neighbor. He pretended pity and surprise: "How could that happen? How could those bodies get on my hooks?"

But he thought to himself: "Now I am indeed a medicine-man. I shall try my powers. I shall bring back to life those ptarmigan which I took from the sled and hid."

The first came to life at his bidding. The man instructed it, "You must come here every summer."

As it flew away, he reanimated the second, and commanded, "You must return here every winter."

Since that time there have been ptarmigan on the Noatak river summer and winter.

THE SERPENT KILLER

Long ago, when the people were moving to the coast one winter for the seal-hunt, a young man with a dog-team came to them. Though he soon knew every one in the village, and was well liked, he never revealed whence he had come. This man married a girl who had many brothers. The man noticed that whenever a son went hunting with the father, he was never seen again. Son after son vanished, nor did the father ever explain what had become of them. When all the sons had gone, other youths went hunting, and they too were never seen

again. The young man also wished to hunt with his father-in-law, but his wife, fearful of what might happen, always entreated him to stay home.

At last, weary of his yearning for hunting, she gave consent and provided clothing, meat, oil, and berries for his journey. He went far along the coast, across a valley and a mountain range, and came at last to a large house with two caches. After tying up the dogs and hiding his sled, he approached the house, walking-stick in hand. Though the young man purposely made much noise, no one came out to greet him, so he began to examine the caches. In one was a great store of seal and beluga meat; the other contained human bodies. Then he passed into the house entrance, where seal meat was stacked on one side and human bodies on the other. The interior was empty, save for a human head which wore labrets. This severed head was alive, and with blinking eyes it watched his movements.

Alarmed, the young man rushed out and prepared to continue his journey. Just then a huge man with two dogs drove up and unharnessed. The young man stopped and watched. The huge man's attention was caught by the actions of his dogs, smelling and sniffing the young man's tracks about the door. The young man hummed a low tune, which put the dogs to sleep. Then, suspicion allayed, the huge man passed inside the house.

The young man made weapons ready to fight. In reconnoitring, he went over the roof and ripped off the smoke-hole cover. A huge hand, which he nimbly dodged, snatched at him. Peering below, he saw his enemy going down the entranceway. As the huge man came out, the youth shot several arrows, scoring each time. With grunts of pain, his adversary returned inside. The youth shot arrow after arrow into his defenseless enemy from the smoke-hole, until the body lay quivering on the floor.

He bathed in urine, changed clothes, and travelled on. In the distance a village loomed. Nearing it, he spied the young men playing kickball. He instructed his dogs not to bite anyone of the village, because it might result in punishment. When the people caught sight of him, they rushed up, four brothers in the lead, in welcome. After an evening of story-telling, the headman sent for the stranger. His hosts begged him to let them accompany him and use their spirit-powers, lest evil befall; but he demurred and went alone.

The headman motioned him to a place near the entrance, and the assemblage of people remained quiet until he had eaten. Then an old man questioned him concerning his journey, and he told the entire tale. All became greatly excited at the news of the death of the huge man; and they were very much pleased, because the giant had taken many men from the village. The old man, the questioner, was especially happy that the head with the labrets was still alive; the head was his son.

The young man, welcomed by all, remained with the four youths who had first met him, and he married their sister. After along period, he began to think of his other wife and to make excuses to leave the village; but this wife refused to let him go. Finally, tired of his persistence, when the young man asked if there were other villages persecuted as this one had been, she yielded and told of one in which dwelled a man-eating serpent tended by four youths. He made preparations for departure, and instructed her: "When I am about to return, I shall appear as a white fox. You must not allow your brothers or the villagers to trap white fox while I am gone. Here are a pair of gloves for you to wear when I return."

Although the other village was but a day's journey away, the man set out early in the morning. From a short distance, hidden behind willows, he watched. He saw many houses, and a playground fenced off with skins. About dusk, all the people gave food to four youths, who carried these offerings to the serpent's home. Afterward the villagers went to the playground, lighted lamps, and began to play games.

The young man stealthily entered the village, climbed to the smoke-hole of the huge, square house, and peeped in. There he saw a great serpent, with scales of flint, coiled about the room. The reptile breathed through holes in its jaws, and had two long, quivering, far-reaching whiskers or tentacles. When these began to creep toward the young man, he picked up his walking-stick and hummed a song. Immediately the serpent fell asleep. Then the young man entered the house and thrust a spear through the serpent's nostrils, killing it. After the coils ceased their death throes, he repaired to the playground and slept. Early in the morning he was awakened by shouting, by the clamor of many voices:

"Which of those four youths was watching the serpent?"

"It is dead!"

"Some one has killed it!"

"The serpent's mother will be here soon, and she will smell out the killer!"

The young man wondered why his wife had not told him of the serpent's mother. Could it be that she wanted him killed?

Soon a great whirring, rushing sound was heard, and the serpent mother weaved into the village. She encircled the playground, breaking down the skin fence to get inside. Within the circumference of her coils were all the people. She searched out each villager in turn with her long whiskers, only to find him guiltless and to move to the next. When she came to the young man, she knew that he had killed her son. Her long tentacles crept toward him, but he jumped over them. As he ran around the playground, she sought to catch him, but his nimbleness enabled him to escape. When nearly exhausted, he grabbed a man and hurled him at the serpent. She ate the body ravenously. To gain breath, the young man threw all the assembled villagers one after the other at the serpent, until he alone was left. Now completely worn out and unable to dodge the tentacles or to leap the coils, he suddenly dived down her throat, barely avoiding the fangs. In the stomach he tried to cut his way out, but the flinty skin all but broke his knife. The stabbing, however, killed the serpent. The young man turned into a bug and crawled out the lifeless throat. Once outside, and in his own form, he began to clean himself with snow, and rubbed so hard that the skin turned white and his form became that of a white fox. He started back to his second wife.

His brothers-in-law had disregarded their sister's request and had set out fox-traps. This the young man soon found out, but avoided them by becoming once more a bug and crawling home. There he crawled into the gloves that he had given his wife and which she kept in a sled.

During the night the wife dreamed of gloves, and in the morning went to the sled. The gloves were safe, but she found the bug, which she merely tossed to one side. Three nights the same dream returned, and each morning she went to the gloves and saw the bug, which seemed to be greatly increasing in size. The thought came to her that her husband was about to return, so she carefully cleaned the house and prepared food. On the fourth morning she went to the sled and drew on the gloves. Then the large bug took on human form and was her husband. He lived the rest of his life in that village, never returning

to his first wife.

THE GIANT MOUSE

Three brothers, Shókok, Yáganuk, and Kúvruvuk, lived with their mother in a cave north of Point Hope. The two younger brothers were great whale-hunters, but they compelled Shókok to remain at home because he was too big and powerful to get in a boat. His great strength was very helpful in landing the boat against the swift current or in pulling whale carcasses on shore, a feat which he could perform easily with one hand.

Because the brothers quarrelled so fiercely amongst themselves, the mother decided to separate them. Shókok she kept at home; Yáganuk was sent down the Noatak river to kill sea-monsters. These animals often travelled far inland to seize and eat people. One of them, shaped like a boat and so colored as to be almost invisible, used to lie inert on the shore. When a person stepped inadvertently on it, the monster with one quick snap of his jaws would swallow the luckless one.

Kúvruvuk was sent forth up the river to Big lake, there to destroy monster serpents and the Giant Mouse. This ferocious beast used to lie in wait along the riverbank and snatch one person from each boat whenever it passed by. Kúvruvuk killed many of the monster serpents, but was unable to cope with the Giant Mouse alone; so he sent for his brother Yáganuk, whose hands and feet were webbed and who was famed as a swimmer.

The two, one swimming and the other paddling his kaiak, went up the river past the lair of the Giant Mouse. The monster, spying them, rushed into the water with a great splash, eager to seize his prey. Yáganuk dived while Kúvruvuk paddled with all speed toward the opposite shore, going so fast that his kaiak hurdled the bank and came to rest some distance inland.

Kúvruvuk rushed back with his spear. He saw a great flurry and thrashing in the water. Spray dashed high, and mud from the bottom spouted up in the furious struggle between the Giant Mouse and Yáganuk. He had attacked the monster from the underside. Kúvruvuk, watching his opportunity, succeeded in driving the spear through the monster's neck, killing it instantly.

Yáganuk then went back downstream to wage war against sea-

monsters, while Kúvruvuk continued to dwell with the Big Lake people, whom he taught to hunt caribou by driving the animals down a lane of willow withes into the lake and there spearing them from kaiaks. Kúvruvuk, strong and brave, often played kickball against the entire village. His arrows were so long that he hung whole caribou carcasses on them to dry. The frame of his sled was composed of sticks as large as a man's arm. Once Kúvruvuk lifted an island from the middle of the lake and set it on the mainland because it was in his pathway.

Kúvruvuk took the head of the Giant Mouse, as big as that of a beluga, set it on a pole, and stuck the pole on top of a bluff. [The skull, lower-jaw missing and the rest much gnawed by animals, is said to be still there on the bluff. The informant, whose father had seen it, relates that the skull is about two feet long and tapers gradually from a width of six inches at the eyes to almost a point at the nasal extremity. Owing to this mole-like head, it was called a "Giant Mouse." Other villagers claim that their fathers had also seen the skull. The tale is current and well known in the Noatak village.]

STORY OF UGÚKNIK

In a large village, far up the Noatak river, it was the rule that no one should go either upstream or down unless permitted by the medicine-man, and then only to hunt caribou. When one man failed to return from a hunt, the medicine-man sent some one in search; this one, too, remained absent. One by one the men departed and were never seen again, until but one man was left in the village. His wife refused to let him leave.

The wife of this man bore children, who also were lost when they reached manhood. One boy, whom the mother called Ugúknik, was given a red-hot stone, a skin ball, and a feather, all of which he swallowed, as his supernatural power. The father of Ugúknik thought: "When my son grows up, he will be sent away like the other men and never be seen again. He will be lost to me like my other sons who never returned. I had better kill him myself now."

The father first tried to spear his son, then shot at him with arrows; but although still a small boy, Ugúknik skilfully dodged all missiles. Another time the father dug a pit in the entranceway and lined the bottom with sharpened stakes; but Ugúknik discovered the trap set for him, and avoided death by placing a log over the sharp points and

safely walking across. Later the father attempted to kill his son, while sleeping, by dropping a stone on his head. Although deep in slumber, Ugúknik moved his head to one side, barely in time. When the father realized his inability to kill, he gave up and instead began to teach and train his son to become a good hunter.

One day Ugúknik, now a sturdy youth, found two strange arrows in the house. His father, being questioned, reluctantly told him that the arrows had belonged to one of his brothers, who, like most of the men, had gone out, never to return. Ugúknik then decided to solve the mystery. At his request, his father made him a kaiak with a cover of caribou-skin. Ugúknik tested it. He saw some quail flying low, and paddled hard to attain their speed; but they soon passed him. He knew that this kaiak would never do; it was too slow, and the seams had been sewn with women's hair. With a second kaiak, Ugúknik easily outsped ducks, and was satisfied. After killing enough caribou to last his parents several seasons, he took food and weapons, and set out upstream to search for his brothers and the lost men of the village. On the way he killed every living thing within range of his weapons, even mice and small birds.

Ugúknik went through a lake and to the headwaters of the river. There, one night, he spied a fire a short distance inland. After hiding his boat, he saw many other kaiaks on the shore, old and rotten, weather-beaten and about to fall to pieces. When he reached the fire, he found only an old woman and her daughter, who offered him food. After the old woman had gone to bed, Ugúknik crawled in beside the girl. To deceive the old woman if she came over to her daughter, and because he was sleeping on the side nearer the mother, Ugúknik cut off some of the girl's braids and fastened them on his own head.

During the night, the old woman reached over, felt the braids on Ugúknik, and thought he was her daughter. She touched the other body, and said, "This reckless one, like those other young men, also has made himself my son-in-law, but I shall kill him now." With one quick slash she cut off the head of her daughter and then went back to bed.

In the morning the old woman and Ugúknik awoke at the same time. In a rage at her mistake, which she only now discovered, she flung a knife at Ugúknik. It missed, and quivered in the wall. Calling her harsh names, he accused her of the murder of his fellow villagers. Then he snatched the knife and threw it, cutting off an arm. With her

remaining hand she hurled the blade again at Ugúknik. He dodged, and threw it back, this time severing the other arm. He now taunted her, and ridiculed her helplessness, until in a great rage she grasped the knife between her teeth and cast it. Again Ugúknik dodged, and in his turn and from his teeth he threw the knife. This time it cut off the woman's head. Ugúknik, having avenged his village, returned home.

The next summer he again set out in his kaiak, this time downstream, because the current was very swift. On his way he speared some animal, which was a seal, and though he did not know what it was, he cut off the head and took it with him.

Seeing smoke inland, Ugúknik hauled up his kaiak and went along the trail. He found a huge two-roomed house, and was welcomed by an old couple and their sons and daughters. After the evening meal, Ugúknik was directed to sleep with one of the daughters. He took the seal-head to bed with him.

During the night, the seal-head suddenly began to bite and eat the girl, who screamed loudly. Ugúknik, in a panic, jumped up and ran out, hotly pursued by four brothers of the girl. He turned, put an arrow in his mouth, then shot and killed one of the men. He ran around a bend and into a large village. The people were up and armed. They shot arrows at Ugúknik, but he dodged all of them. When the people surrounded him, he leaped over the human chain and fled toward his kaiak. His pursuers became polar bears, and pressed hard on his heels, but he succeeded in reaching his boat and drawing out of range. Then Ugúknik paddled homeward.

THE KOBUK MASSACRE

Because the Kobuk often lay in wait and shot down the Noatak people as they travelled up the river, the Noatak sailed in groups to resist attack. A large hunting party once landed at Big lake and prepared to camp. A scout, famed for his farsightedness, went ahead. He saw a Kobuk creeping through the willows, but the others, unable to locate the man, laughed at him and made camp. In the morning the men left to round up caribou, leaving the women behind. They encountered some Point Hope hunters and killed them, because too many people would scare away game.

After the hunt, the men sent two messengers to their women. These found many of the women dead and lashed together with raw-

hide, and others were missing. One followed the trail of the slayers, whom they knew to be Kobuk, while the other ran swiftly to inform the hunters.

A pursuit was organized, and several nights later the lone scout met the party and informed them that their enemy was near by, camped in a thicket. Soon two Noatak women prisoners came out to gather wood. These the headman met and instructed to build a large fire, but to run when the fighting commenced.

While the enemy Kobuk were drying clothing about the large fire, the Noatak poured a cloud of arrows into their midst and then rushed on them. They succeeded in killing all but one man, whom they took prisoner.

The Noatak fastened a thong from their prisoner's feet to his labret holes and forced him to walk. His many stumbles tore the skin down to his jawbone. Thus they sported themselves in revenge. Wearying, the Noatak told the prisoner that if he could climb a small bluff, still tied in that manner, they would give him his freedom. The Kobuk succeeded in the climb, though he tore the thong through his flesh in the attempt. Then the Noatak killed him.

WARFARE WITH THE KOBUK

Near the headwaters of Noatak river was a village called "Old Tongue." Here lived a woman with her stepson, though they usually went over on Kobuk river for the winter, and in the spring hunted caribou. Then they returned with the meat to the village. When in their winter quarters, the stepmother continually warned the youth to hide his bow every night outside, and never to leave it hanging on a post with his snowshoes.

One winter night the youth was awakened by a sharp pinch in the side. He thought first that his stepmother had thus awakened him, but then he smelled an odor of strangers. He saw a person, a Kobuk, standing by his bed. Putting on his parka, he said aloud and to himself, "I must go out and urinate."

The stranger answered, "You should have done that before you went to bed,"

In the entranceway the youth saw many Kobuk people. Guilefully, he spoke in the Kobuk language, saying, "I am going outside to urinate," and passed unmolested outside. He quickly snatched his

bow from its hiding-place, and called for the strangers to come out and fight. As they left the entranceway at his cry, he shot them one by one. Then, unmindful of his stepmother, he ran hard for the Noatak village. Looking back, the youth saw many Kobuk people pursuing, and two warriors attempting to intercept. To avoid capture, he hid under a snowbanks and when the two came near, he shot them both. Then he fled to his village to warn them of the enemy.

All made ready to repel an attack, and advanced to meet the enemy. The Noatak people thought the Kobuk too strong to be attacked, so they returned to their own village. The Kobuk also thought the Noatak too numerous, and went back to their village.

The stepmother, wrathful at having been left behind, crept to the Noatak village and in revenge stabbed two villagers with her flint knife.

"The Noatak"
From
The North American Indian: Volume 20
by Edwards S. Curtis