

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Descartes Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Melville Bebel Proust
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Voltaire Federer Herodot
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Grillparzer Georgy
Chamberlain Langbein Gryphius
Brentano Claudius Schiller Lafontaine Kralik Iffland Sokrates
Strachwitz Bellamy Schilling Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
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Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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Short Sketches from Oldest America

John B. (John Beach) Driggs

Imprint

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Publishers' Preface

From the small size of this volume, one would hardly realize, perhaps, what an immense amount of labor and patient research its writing must necessarily represent. The author, who was first sent to northwestern Alaska in the summer of 1890, and who, by the bye, has, with the exception of two vacations of a year each, been constantly at his post in that bleak country ever since, found himself one day landed, with his possessions, upon the inhospitable seabeach of the Point Hope peninsula, where for weeks he was compelled to shelter himself from wind and rain, as best he could, in an improvised tent made of barrels and boxes with canvas thrown over them. Finally, the carpenters of some of the whaling ships were got together and a house, which had been framed in distant San Francisco, was put up for him, a few hundred yards from the water's edge.

A mile or so away lay a large native village, the inhabitants of which naturally regarded him as a great curiosity. But he found himself quite unable to communicate with them otherwise than by signs, as the printed vocabularies and grammars, with which he had been supplied, proved to be inaccurate and practically valueless.

His house finished and no scholars being forthcoming, he proceeded one day to capture a native lad whom he found on the beach, and, leading him home, taught him several letters of the alphabet and then baked him a cake. This system of rewarding attendance with something to eat rapidly brought other scholars. Older visitors followed, and he soon had a school in active operation and then a lecture-room.

Prior to Dr. Driggs's arrival, the experiences which the natives had had with the whites had not been universally satisfactory. Outside of rare meetings with the officers and crews of the government's revenue cutters, their white acquaintances had been pretty much confined to the class known as "beach-combers," or deserters from the steam-whaling fleet. These are described as a rough, unscrupulous set of fellows, too worthless to obtain better employment in San Francisco, where they are enlisted. Some of these undesirable visitors had already appeared at Point Hope and had outra-

geously abused the peaceful inhabitants before our author's arrival there.

In contrast with such men as these, Dr. Driggs proved himself a friend indeed to the poor natives, and succeeded in due time in winning the affection and confidence of their entire tribe. Little by little he mastered their language, until he has become so proficient in it that he is now planning to write a grammar.

During the summer months many of the Point Hope natives are away from home for long intervals in quest of game or on fishing expeditions, and the doctor would frequently follow their example, making long excursions along the coast, as far north as Icy Cape, if not further; and southward, along the shores of Kotzebue Sound. Similarly for many winters, wearied with confinement to the house during the long night, he was wont to set out, accompanied by some native guide and wife with dog-team and sledge, to make trips of several hundred miles over ice and snow, exposed to blizzards such as we have no conception of, camping out when weary in an improvised snow-house, or sleeping, perhaps, in some native settlement, where the only fare would be uninviting frozen fish. These last excursions, however, he has been obliged to discontinue in consequence of having frozen one of his feet, several years since, when he fell from an ice floe into the ocean, and was with difficulty dragged out by his companions.

And right here it might be as well to observe that the pretty picture which childhood's memories depict as adorning a page in our *Physical Geography*, with its fur-clad traveler sitting comfortably on his sledge, brandishing his whip and dashing gaily along behind a row of trotting dogs, is more imaginative than accurate. The real use of the dog-team, it would appear, is merely to drag the traveler's baggage. The men plough along through the snow in front, and the animals, harnessed in single file, drag the sledge behind them, following the woman, to whom they are accustomed to turn for their food.

Thrown thus into close contact with Dr. Driggs, their physician when ill, their teacher in health, their friend and protector always, the natives gradually learned to discard the suspicion with which they must have originally regarded him, and confided to him their

traditions and legends, which primarily they would naturally have guarded with the most sedulous care. How many an evening camp-fire, how many a long conversation must these primitive tales represent! How much patience, upon the hearer's part, it must have required to corroborate these traditions by comparing one account with another and noting their remarkable similarity! These sketches are real native stories put into readable English, without any attempt at embellishment or enlargement.

Near the native village of Tigara extends, for a considerable distance, the ancient burial place of the tribe. Here, upon elevated platforms, supported high above the ground on whales' jaws, out of the reach of wild animals, have slumbered the dead for ages past. In and beneath these places of sepulture, Dr. Driggs has found many interesting relics of great antiquity, which he has brought away with him. Among these were the original instruments used in by-gone ages for making flint axes and arrow-heads. These the reader will find described in the text.

The site originally selected for Dr. Driggs's house was too close to the shore. He found this out one night when a storm brought the water of the Arctic Ocean up over the land, and a succession of big waves forced his door open. Carrying a native lad on his back, he was compelled to wade, in total darkness, through the icy water, for several hundred yards before he reached terra firma. After this startling experience, his house was moved to higher ground and further inland; but, proving always extremely cold, it was subsequently replaced, as a dwelling, by another and smaller building which was protected from the piercing wind by a thick casing of sod.

In conclusion, we will say that Dr. Driggs is a man of iron constitution, strong physically and mentally, an excellent shot, and one who hardly knows the meaning of the word *fear*. In years to come, his name will rightly go down to history as that of a hero.

Preface

During many years spent within the Arctic Circle of Northwestern Alaska, at Tig-a-ra (Point Hope Village), where I have lived at the mission station of the Episcopal Church, acting as medical man

and teacher, and, later on, in deacon's orders, I have naturally become interested in these ancient people, and have written the following volume of short stories simply to show the nature, traditions and legends of the In-u-pash.[1] I have also introduced a few brief sketches, hoping to give a little insight into the simplicity of these primitive people who have been isolated from the outside world from the most remote time. There has been no attempt made to exhaust the subject.

John B. Driggs, M.D.

April, 1905.

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I

INTRODUCTION

Only those who have had the experience, know the pleasure of traveling outside the beaten tracks and viewing new scenes that are not generally known to the average tourist of to-day. Every year the Atlantic has its throngs who are crossing the ocean to visit old places which have become familiar to the majority of readers. There is a route for the student of nature, which has been only partially opened of recent years, that presents many points of interest. While nature has not yet become defaced by the artificial scenes which the Atlantic tourist meets throughout his journey, the traveler can try the newer way by turning his steps toward the Pacific and visiting Alaska. There may not be all the comforts one experiences on the Atlantic, but the ocean voyage will be found plenty long, and there will be the satisfaction of viewing one's own country.

Alaska is a vast and not thoroughly explored territory, with many different tribes of people, whose history if it were but known, would fill many an interesting volume. The signs of an advancing civilization are to be noted in the way of small towns and mining camps, extending even as far north as Nome; then, if the journey is continued through the Behring Straits into the Arctic regions—where in winter, the moon forms its circle in the heavens, while in summer, the sun remains up as if trying to make amends for its long winter's absence—up as far as Point Hope to the village of Tigara, the tourist will find there an interesting and friendly people. His first impression probably is, what a bleak and barren coast! but, should he allow his thoughts to wander back to the remote past, he can imagine how in ages gone by this may have been an Eden with its luxuriant vegetation and a much milder climate. The huge mammoth roamed freely through the forest, along with many other animals that have long since passed into the forgotten history of long ago. Then through the changes of nature the warming ocean currents were shut off, causing this to become the bleak and barren country it is now, enveloped in ice the greater portion of the year. The belt of cold, acting as a barrier, isolates the people from the outside world, and they have continued living in their primitive condition until the present awakening.

Should the geologist inform the villager that North America was once under water, only the tops of the highest mountains extending above the one great ocean, like so many islands, and that then the ocean currents carried their warmth to the Pole, the Tigara man would reply: "Yes, in very old times only three mountain-tops extended above the ocean, and it was at a very remote day that my ancestors first appeared."

Should the evolutionist inform the villager that man did not at first stand in an erect position as at present, but went round on his hands and feet; that the sperm whale originated from an animal akin to the bear; and that other great changes have taken place among the various members of the animal kingdom, the Tigara man would again reply: "Yes, the earliest men did not have their lower extremities developed for walking; the Bow-head whale originated from an animal similar to the deer, while another member of the whale family, called the Killer, armed with large teeth instead of baleen, originated from an animal akin to the wolf; the deer of old was a hornless and carnivorous animal, having teeth like those of the bear, its canines being quite long, and when it appeared in herds the earlier inhabitants were alarmed, as it used to attack and devour the people." He will also tell you that its fat was similar to the blubber of the seal, or perhaps more like that of the domestic hog, but the animal for some unknown reason began eating the salmon-berries called "achea," and in time became herbivorous; with the change of diet it gradually changed its habits, growing horns and losing its back teeth, ultimately becoming the caribou of the present.

The man of Tigara, through his traditions, has known all these things for ages past, while the man of science is only finding them out through his patient investigations.



A Group of Inupash

The visitor can now enter into an interesting train of thought while saying to himself: "What need is there of crossing the wide ocean, with the delusion we are visiting the old world, while there are here in our own country the oldest Americans, a race of men who, according to their traditions and the rude architecture of their homes, can antedate any people to be seen by the tourist on his beaten lines of travel?"

II

THE TRAGEDY OF THE THREE BROTHERS

In the east not far from the region of the Romanzoff Mountains, toward the land of the Cogmoliks, there lived during the early days four brothers. The eldest had taken a trip on the ocean in his kayak or light skin boat. As the day drew to a close he had not returned, but it excited no attention among the members of the family, as it was a usual thing for any of the people to stay a few days at a friendly igloo[2] without leaving word at home where they were going, or how long they would be absent. Some acquaintances coming along reported that they had not seen anything of the missing man; then suspicion began to be aroused that everything might not be right and a search was instituted, but no trace could be found of him or his kayak; no one along the coast seemed able to throw any light on his whereabouts, although they lent their aid by joining in with the searching party.

As time went by, all hopes of the missing one's return were abandoned. The people talked about the case as one of those mysteries which had no solution. Then later on, a second brother, venturing on a trip, disappeared as completely as did the first. The remaining brothers were much alarmed and did not know what to do. A third brother started out determined if possible, to make a more thorough investigation, but disappeared the same as the others.

There now remained only Ahvooyoolachā, the youngest of the four. He was bowed down with grief at the great loss he had sustained, but it remained for him to solve the mystery. He went out in his kayak and had not proceeded far from shore when his attention was attracted by what appeared to be a whale in the distance. It was a common sight so he gave it no heed, and even when the supposed whale came closer he paid no attention to it.

Not until the creature came very near and charged him with a huge open mouth armed with great teeth, did he become alarmed. What to do he did not know; there was no chance to escape to the shore; he was unarmed, with the exception of a spear which seemed altogether too insignificant an instrument to defend himself with against such a huge monster; yet in his dilemma it was the only chance he had. Grasping the spear with a hand rendered firm by

despair, he awaited the right moment, and just as the animal was about to close its massive jaws to crush him and his frail kyak (aiming down the throat, his fright lending strength to the action) he cast the spear with great force. The aim had been good and the throw a powerful one. The creature instantly dove remaining down for quite a while, then floated to the surface, dead. Upon examining the body, it was found to be as large as that of a whale, at the same time resembling that animal in appearance, but in addition it had four legs. The mystery had been solved and Ahvooyoolachā at last knew the fate of his three brothers.

The Whales of Alaska

There are two varieties of the whale much sought for on account of the baleen they yield. The Right Whale of the Behring Sea, as well as of other waters, and the Bow-head that makes its summer run along the American coast as far as the Arctic Archipelago. In September it strikes westward to Herald Island, and in October back to the Behring Sea, where it is supposed to spend the winter months at the southern edge of the ice. It is one of the large members of the whale family, sometimes attaining a length of sixty feet or more and yielding whalebone sometimes over twelve feet in length. The Bow-head is a timid, peaceful animal, preferring to visit the small bays and secluded nooks of the northern coast, where it can feed unmolested.

All along the coast of Arctic Alaska, there are lagoons of various sizes; many of them have streams as feeders, while others have no feeders but have openings into the ocean, which become temporarily obliterated by sand when there is a heavy sea breaking on shore.

It was into the latter form of lagoon that, a very long time ago, a school of Bow-heads had entered. The wind blowing on shore had obliterated the entrance, so the whales were entrapped with apparently no means of escape, yet they all crossed the beach and regained the ocean, a feat they probably could not accomplish to-day. The people watched them as they worked their way over the beach, the large ones making rapid progress while the small ones were very slow.

The Killer is one of the larger members of the whale family, which the natives prefer not to attack, as it can be very vicious at times. Even much further south than Alaska, the creature has the reputation among the shore whalers, of chasing the boats to the shore occasionally and has had many victims. Its chief food is the seal and beluga, while its sly disposition enables it also to capture the water birds. Placing itself just beneath the surface, with open jaws, it emits a substance that attracts the birds who settle down on the waves and begin feeding; the Killer then darts forward, capturing the birds which it quickly devours. It is also said sometimes to attack as large an animal as the Fin-back.

III

THE METIGEWĒK

The Metigewĕk was the largest of the numerous traditionary birds of Tigara. Its enormous size and strength enabled it to seize and bear to the interior the whales on which it used to feed. Even to-day when the older inhabitants find the skeleton of a whale, back from the coast in the interior of the country, they declare it was the victim of a Metigewĕk at some remote time of the past.

One of the earlier inhabitants has been credited with a somewhat similar experience to that of Ganymede.

A hunter having killed a deer was in the act of cutting it up preparatory to carrying it home. Noticing a shadow coming over the ground, he looked up just as a Metigewĕk swooped down and seized him in its enormous claws and bore him aloft. The bird carried him to a great height, so that the earth was almost lost to view. The man having retained his spear began stabbing the bird; at last the wounds proving fatal, the Metigewĕk gradually descended and reached the earth just as it expired. That night the hunter slept under the wing of the bird, ultimately reaching his home in safety.

IV

ORIGIN OF MAN

There is a fascination at the camp-fire. Men that have remained silent through the day will become entertaining under the genial influence of the crackling logs as they blaze and send their myriads of sparks skyward. So this evening as I examine the notes in my Polar log-book, collected at many of those fires, I find that man, no matter how humiliating the admission may be, is forced to yield the palm of antiquity to woman and—chewing gum. Yet as we pause to consider the subject, from the Polar man's point of view, it is but natural that woman should be first, for without her aid there certainly would be no men.

My log-book says that at a very early time of the world's history, long before day and night had been created, or the first man had made his appearance, there lived an old woman, indeed very old, for the tradition of her having had a beginning, if there ever was such a one, had been lost. We must bear in mind that during the first stage of the world everything remained young and fresh; nothing grew old. It was not until a much later date that the indiscretion of a boy brought those physiological changes known as growing old into the world and placed a limitation to the period of youth. The old woman was like a young girl in her appearance and feelings, and being the only inhabitant of the earth, naturally felt very lonesome and wished for a companion. She was one time chewing "pooyā" (chewing gum) when the thought arose in her mind that it would be pleasant to have an image to play with, so taking her "pooyā" she fashioned a man, then by way of ornamentation placed a raven's beak on his forehead.

She was delighted with her success in making such a lovely image and on lying down to sleep placed it near her side. On awakening her joy was great, for the image had come to life and there before her was the first man.