

PARTURITION AMONG THE ESKIMOS.

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While spending the winter in northwestern Alaska I was very much interested in witnessing an Eskimo woman giving birth to a child. It is seldom that a "cablona" (whiteman) doctor is permitted to witness this trying ordeal. However, as I had treated different members of the family and had gained their confidence I was permitted on this occasion to be present.

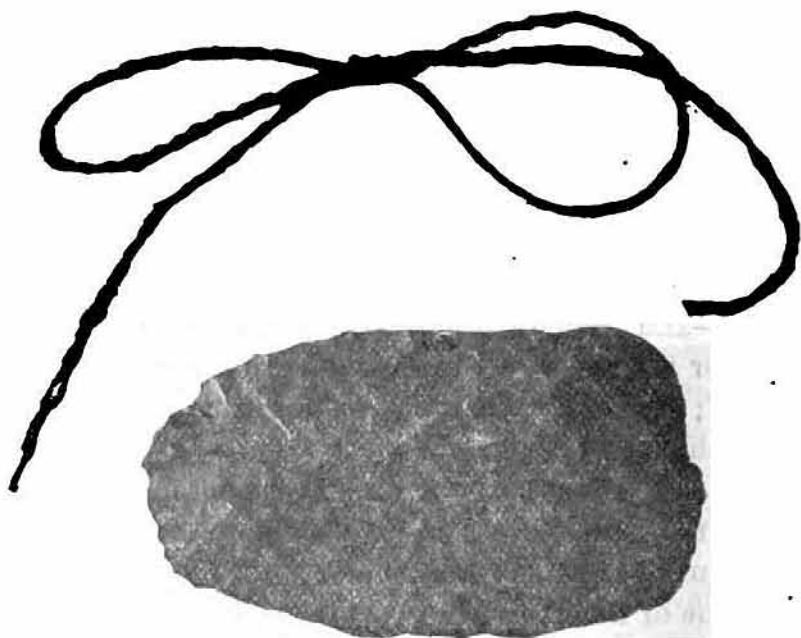
It is the custom among the Eskimos not to be confined in an "igloo," or house. The woman must go into the woods or brush alone—no one, not even the husband, being allowed to be present—and remain there with no food except a piece of dried fish for "five sleeps," when she is permitted to return to the "igloo"; no doubt, that being the time required for the lochial discharge to cease. Whereupon, she and her husband take a bath and change their undergarments, when they are fortunate enough to have a change. They are then supposed to be clean until the next confinement.

At the time of the monthly periods of menstruation a woman is not allowed to enter a boat or ride upon a sled of her husband.

In January, 1899, during the long winter nights after "old sol" had bid adieu to the people of northern Alaska, to seek a more genial clime in the sunny south, and in the midst of an Arctic blizzard, a messenger, a little Eskimo boy, came to my "igloo" and announced that "Mama speak catchem mickaninny by and by," "speak" being a term in universal use. I arose from my bed, dressed myself in fur clothing, and started for the scene, a short distance away, the thermometer ranging from 30 to 40° F. below zero, where I found the woman out in the brush in a snow pit, oval in shape, about two feet deep and six feet across, with a few spruce boughs thrown around the

margin as a windbrake, together with a smoky fire of twigs. The parturient chamber (?) had been prepared by the woman herself, by scattering a thin layer of dried grass prepared by her for this occasion, upon which was spread a reindeer skin, with no covering of any kind.

On my arrival at the parturient field I found the woman in labor, on her knees, with buttocks resting on her heels, and having severe bearing down pains, which came faster and faster and more severe until almost continuous, when the bag of waters ruptured. The mother of the woman and my interpreter, the little boy, who were near by, began to exclaim "Mama muckey, mama muckey,"—"muckey" meaning to die. I asked the boy what was the matter with mama, he said in reply, "Mama look



see pechuck,"—"pechuck" meaning no, or negative, or in other words, she could not see; her blindness, no doubt being due to syncope. I assured them that mama would soon be all right, and not to be frightened. She soon rallied and labor progressed naturally through the second stage, and after an interval of one-half to three fourths of an hour, the pains returned. She again had syncope, no doubt due to hemorrhage. She soon rallied again and expelled the placenta, whereupon she took a piece of sinew, which had been previously prepared from the hock of a caribou, and ligated the cord as close to the umbilicus as possible, then severed the cord close to the ligature with a piece of serrated flint as shown in the cut. She washed the babe in

snow, although it rebelled by kicking and squalling lustily at such a cold reception. Notwithstanding the rigorous conditions surrounding the Eskimo mother in childbirth, the rate of mortality of the babes born will agree favorably with our own death-rate, and the same may also be said of the mother. Nature moves in a mysterious manner to perform her miracles and reproduce herself.

The woman wore a belt or a piece of thong to confine her "parka" around the waist, and to it was fastened by short deerskin thongs, bits of ivory, buttons, leather bags in which



she kept tobacco, matches, and other small articles of value. After the snow bath she placed her babe underneath the folds of her "parka," which is the usual resting place of the young Eskimo (although sometimes astride the mother's neck), and proceeded in a bent over position with staff in hand for support, stepping slowly and laboriously, leaving a trail of blood, to another snow pit about fifty feet away which had been prepared, and where the above photograph was taken. She would not remain any length of time at the place where the babe was born, for it is considered unclean.

Our own women think they have an awful time during confinement, and some of them do, but what a contrast between them and their Eskimo sisters! Just imagine for a moment one of our women confining herself alone and under such conditions!

Generally speaking, from a moral standpoint, the Eskimos are not as immoral as one would naturally suppose. They seem to have a law which is inherent in the hearts of all rational beings, to "do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you," and I believe that these people live up to that law more nearly perfectly than do their more enlightened and civilized neighbors. They despise a thief. They are honest in their dealings among themselves and with strangers, but are simple and credulous and are easily deceived, showing they are not liable to deceive others. They are hospitable in their domestic relations, kind and devoted to each other. They have one good trait that is worthy of emulation, that is, the universal consideration paid by all to the very old and feeble. The extraordinary kind and indulgent treatment of their children is a trait common to all of those northern tribes.
