ROBERT MARSHALL
Wiseman
Alaska

October 26, 1930

Dear Family et al:

After four weeks around Wiseman, I filled my packsack with a few essentials, picked up my snowshoes and started out last Monday morning for a trip down river to see the country and meet the fellows who are mining on the Porcupine. I set out with Bobbie Jones, who had some work to do at Coldfoot and on the Porcupine and who also wanted to do some hunting. Bobbie has the fastest dog team in Wiseman and I rode all the way down to Coldfoot with him. It was my first real dog sled ride and gave me a thrill I don't ever recall before from transportation. It took us two hours to make the 11½ miles to Coldfoot so you see we weren't going very fast but when the four dogs hit a downhill stretch the sled just seemed to be flying. Actually at such spots I suppose we might have been travelling 15 miles an hour. But one sits so close to the ground on a dog sled that it seems to whiz by much faster than when you're going 40 miles an hour in an auto. You tear along between dark green spruce trees rising from fresh, powdery snow, are brushed by the willow branches and the evergreen leaves of the Alaska Tea, follow the beautiful rhythm of the legs of the huskies as they beat on the trail, have time to look up at the mountaintops and note the constantly changing outlines they cut against the deep blue sky, and feel yourself to be a part of the world through which you are travelling. In the auto, on the other hand, you are you and the landscape is the landscape and never is there any merging between the two, always the one, however beautiful, is external.

Coldfoot is a strange town. It has dozens of houses, four or five streets and not a single inhabitant. Back in the booming days of 1901-1902, when the big stampede was on to Gold Creek, Myrtle Creek and Emma Creek there were several hundred people who made Coldfoot their headquarters and seven gay saloons brightened the Arctic winter. For eight years it was the metropolis of the Koyukuk, a single oasis of teeming vitality in hundreds of thousands of square miles of frigid wilderness. Then in 1908 the big strike was made on Nolan Creek, and in the next three or four years more money was taken from this one stream and its tributaries than from the whole Koyukuk previous to that time.

A new town sprang up on the Koyukuk, 15 miles above Coldfoot, at the point where freight for Nolan had to be landed for the 7 mile haul overland to the creek. This town became Wiseman. For a few years Coldfoot managed to give it a fairly good run for its money, but then in 1912 Hammond River was struck, nearly two million dollars came out of it and Wiseman also became the river terminus for this development. So Coldfoot dropped steadily in population, year after year, till finally there was hardly anyone except natives living there. Myrtle Creek, last of the rich diggings which had made Coldfoot prosperous, at length was abandoned, the native school was moved to Wiseman and nobody was left in Coldfoot except an old German bootlegger who had once run one of its gaudiest saloons

and Dan Aston, the half crazy roadhouse proprietor. But John Kleffens was drowned two years ago last spring while fording the Koyukuk in flood and Dan Aston blew out his brains during the dark days last winter so now there are nothing but a few mice to listen to the wind gusts blowing downstream along the Koyukuk.

Bobbie and I spent the afternoon chopping wood and fixing up a few odds and ends. We stopped in Dan Aston's old roadhouse which Bobbie now owned and used as a stopping place on his frequent trips down river. Big Charlie, a lazy, good natured eskimo who was in camp 12 miles downstream with his wife and 15 year old daughter, snowshoed in on us during the afternoon. He was en route to Wiseman for supplies.

That evening, just at dusk, I walked out across the snow to the point where Slate Creek, a large stream, joins the Koyukuk. The houses of Coldfoot were hidden by the trees. Upstream it was almost dark and even with snow on them the mountains which hemmed the river as far as one could see looked black. But not as black as the spruce trees in the foreground across Slate Creek which as night approached first lost their three dimensional appearance and became merely flat, black objects on the landscape, and then lost even their outlines and became a blurred mass of darkness. But downstream to the southwest the twilight persisted for a long time. Twelvemile Mountain stood out black and clear against it, the deep valley of the Middle Fork to its left, the brightest of the orange sunset sky to its right. I kept looking around up and downstream, watching the darkness creep down from the north and the stars come out, watching the orange fade slowly in the south. All the while, as an accompaniment to what was passing before my eyes, the wind and the unfrozen waters of Slate Creek were putting on a symphony, sometimes rising to a great crescendo, sometimes dying down so that I could hear nothing but the unending but constantly varying rushing of the water. It reminded me of the drum undertone which runs through the entire Bolero, by Ravel, never the same at any two instants but still exactly the same throughout the whole song.

Then it occurred to me why the eskimos to whom I have played it are so crazy about the Bolero, why according to what everyone tells me their music is so similar to it. Because the Bolero is a perfect counterpart of the music they have heard from earliest childhood out in the wilderness of the north. The drums are the rivers rumbling unvaryingly and the rest of the orchestra is the wind howling, the ice cracking, snowslides coming down the mountains, rocks tumbling over one another, the wild animals howling. It represents to the natives all the chaotic music of nature in its wildest moments.

After supper I took another walk, this time through the deserted city of Coldfoot and out to the old cemetery. There was no moon but I could see every house in town plainly, each roof a bright white where the stars and the northern lights shone on the roof. But I couldn't see clearly enough by night to realize that the houses were slowly tumbling to ruin and so it looked to me for all the world like a live little town after everyone had gone to bed and the last light was out.

Then I got to imagining some mythical old miner who might have left Coldfoot in the fall of 1907 while it was still running strong. I decided that this fellow had not met anyone from the Koyukuk in all those years and so assumed that Coldfoot was still a booming town. Then he determined in the autumn of 1930 to come back to the Koyukuk and prospect some creek which had impressed him long ago as being very promising and which had of course grown in his imagination during the quarter of a century which had intervened. So he would take the boat to Beaver and start out on the long, tedious walk across country from the Yukon via the Chandalar to the Koyukuk. After six nights in old cabins along the way he would come down Slate Creek the seventh evening, living in his imaginination during miles of tiresome travel the gay evening ahead. He would wonder if Linda, his favorite whore was still there, would doubt it but still hope, adding 23 to a conservative estimate of her age in that distant day. Then he would pass the familiar cemetery to the right and laugh as there would suddenly recur to him the night when bald-headed John Bowman, lying drunk among the wooden slabs, had suddenly sat up just as Kobuk Mary was passing, and how she seeing the moonlight on his shiny pate had thought it a spirit and run frantically the long mile to town. But now the mile would seem short to the old miner, knowing that only a few minutes intervened before he'd get a warm shot of whiskey and a hilarious evening. Then he would see the first dark house through the trees, soon several of them and he'd wonder why everyone had gone to bed so early. In a few moments he'd be right in the town and not perceive a single light. That indeed would be strange for the saloons and the sporting houses should be bright and noisy till far into the night. Could it be prohibition? Or maybe his watch had gone crazy and it was much later than he thought.

Oh, here it was, Linda's old house. He'd give it a try. He would bang on the door but no answer. Then he would shout. Yes, the old girl must have gone. Well, he really expected it anyway. There was Jack's house. Somebody should be living there still. It had been the finest in town. But no answer there either.

Then he would notice that the snow in the streets had not been tramped down and there was no sign of footsteps leading to any house. He would run up and down, pounding at every door and shouting at the top of his lungs. But there would be no answer, no sound save here and there some little rodent, frightened by his pounding, scurrying away across a rotting floor. At last it would dawn on him that the town was deserted, that a civilization had come and flourished and died within the span of his memory.

Then he would look up and see the mountain across the river, the stars in the sky, Orion just rising over Sitkum Pass. There would be something almost unbelievably friendly about these only unchanged elements in that ancient world of his. So he would shoulder his pack again, leave the town, too dead even for ghosts, and set out for some clump of timber where he would shiver through the night by an inadequate fire, when he might have slept warmly in one of the old houses.

Next morning early I started down river to Porcupine Creek. This is the Slavic center of the region for six of the seven Slavs in the Wiseman community have claims down here and several others have

gone outside within recent years. Just at present there are only three men working here, old Tom Kovick from Montenegro and Sam and Obran Stanich from Bosnia-Herzegovina. I met Sam and Obran in the woods, cutting timbers for the new hole they are sinking, and they immediately laid off work for the day and took me up to their house. They talked eagerly about all sorts of subjects, showed me proudly the new house they had just built, took me down by a 29 foot ladder into their old hole from which they had taken many thousand dollars, and exhibited their remarkable cabbages, turnips and potatoes they had grown in their garden. They were so pleased to show off their possessions to me, simple and modest but very comfortable. There was a justifiable and indeed a highly commendable pride in being able to point to every improvement they had and say: "We did this all ourselves, made the plans and executed them without anyone else's help."

Sam and Obran are clear-eyed, strong, confident of their ability to cope with any situation that may arise but modest and not at all boastful. They are young for this community, only 44 and 41 years old. They are gay and continually laughing, and like almost all people from the far north they exhibit the very acme of easy hospitality. Of course, tho I'd never seen Sam before and Obran only for a few minutes, I soon felt as if they were old friends.

Sam came to America in 1902 and Obran in 1909. They had been raised on a farm in the old country. Neither ever went even one day to school; they can barely read or write in either English or their native language. Their English is very broken. They had an uncle who was head night watchman at the Anaconda Smelter of the A. C. M. and he got each of them a job for the A. C. M. when they first came to America. They are very proud of this uncle. From Anaconda both migrated to Alaska, Sam in 1906, Obran in 1910, and they came into the Koyukuk from the Iditarod in 1916. They bought a claim on the Porcupine and have worked there ever since. It is ground which yields no sensational returns and involves much heavy rock work. The native born Americans and the nordic Europeans won't consider that type of drudgery; they want something where there's more of a gamble, more of a chance for a sudden fortune. But Sam and Obran have been content with a steady income of three or four thousand a year between them, never more, and today they are actually better off financially than all but about four or five men in the whole camp. They are probably worth between $10,000. and $20,000. apiece, whereas others who made $50,000. in a single cleanup are now broke.

Two days with Sam and Obran impressed me most vividly with what economic security and freedom can do for men. Outside I can plainly picture Sam and Obran. With their lack of education and modest amount of intelligence they would be unskilled laborers, half the time unemployed, struggling desperately to merely exist, bored with work, getting their few thrills vicariously through movies, never conscious that there is a joy in just being alive, seldom gay and only hilarious when drunk. They would be inferior people, having no confidence in themselves, seldom making a decision more important than whether to buy a banana or not. But up here, though they work more laboriously, and go through greater physical hardships than they ever would in industrial civilization, though they lack conveniences which

even the most poverty-stricken New York family would have, still they live with every comfort they crave (except women), are not only interested in but actually excited about their work, talk as eagerly of it outside working hours as any scientist might speak of his investigations, get thrills first Hand from hunting, difficulties overcome, beautiful nuggets uncovered, people met unexpectedly, and are conscious always of the joy of being their own bosses and guiding their own destinies.

"I've had better time here in North Country", Sam said to me, "because I'm my own boss, independent man. Even if I only make three or four dollars day I'm my boss."

Obran, when we were down under the ground together, had said very much the same thing.

"I'm my own boss," he remarked too. "Winter time I like to work and I can work, summer time I want to rest a few days when it's hot, I can rest. In here pretty nearly everyone working for himself, nobody to drive you and everybody your friend like one big family."

That evening we went down the creek quarter of a mile to old Tom Kovich's cabin where Bobbie Jones was stopping. The talk centred chiefly on socialism, everyone in the cabin strangely enough being a socialist. From this it naturally drifted to militarism and old Tom spoke very interestingly about his experiences in Montenegro. It was to avoid the army that he came over to America in 1901, for they had sent him to military school, "teaching me how to shoot gun, which way go, which way come back, how save yourself, how kill other man, all militarism which I don't like."

Tom too has joy in freedom which is so characteristic in everyone in this North Country. These were his words. "Any time I want to go home and take rest I am free, sit down in cut* I am free, go hunt I am free. When I work for other man I never free. When somebody work for me in cut I told him what to be done and then don't bother him no more. He do more that way too when he free."

Next morning I set off to see as much country as I could in a day's walk down the river trail and back. I followed down the Koyukuk 16 miles, across Twelvemile Creek, around Windy Arm and down to the Portage Barn. The timber I passed through was all stunted spruce in soil too wet and too frozen for anything but the slowest growth.

I had a fine chance to study the ecological conditions. On my way back, just below Windy Arm, I followed tracks to Big Charlie's camp where his wife Bessie and his very pretty little daughter Jennie were fishing through the ice. Thanks to my lessons I was able to

* A cut is the ditch which is dug in order to reach bedrock just on top of which all the gold is found.

greet them with con-no-wit-bit uv-no-vak (how do you feel this afternoon) and could stroke my beard and say u-mik poll-uk (big beard), so we got along very gayly for the half hour I shayed with them. They had nothing to eat but fish, berries and a little flour.

I got back to the Porcupine just after a splendid sunset, which brightened all the peaks to the north with the strangest orange light. Next morning I said goodbye to my friends and returned the 16 miles to Wiseman. Saw about 60 ptarmigan on the way but my 30 Springfield rifle was too heavy to use on them. I bumped into Ike Spinks, whom I hadn't seen since last year, at Coldfoot. He is an exceptionally intelligent Scotchman, an ardent atheist and a very keen observer of the life he has seen, both white and native. We had a most enjoyable conversation allthe way home. While we were eating lunch at the Marion Creek cabin, Jim Wilson came along and stopped to talk, so you will see that the trail was certainly crowded this day.

As ever,

Bob.

October 31, 1930.

Dear Family et al:

Now that I've been back from the North Fork exploration for 5½ weeks during all but one of which I've been right here in town, I guess I ought to devote one letter to describing my life in Wiseman. I can't, however, use the method I used to employ when I was in the West and describe a typical day because there's no such thing as a typical day here. About all I do according to schedule is to get up some time between 7 and 8, cook and eat breakfast immediately thereafter, sweep my cabin, make my bed and wash the dishes after that, fix a light lunch for myself sometime between noon and two, eat supper with Martin Slisco in the roadhouse around six and retire between 10:30 and 12:30. But even this isn't as regular as it sounds in stating and it certainly is a great luxury not to have to get up a moment before I feel like it, in contrast to last winter during so much of which I rose each morning by alarm clock between 3:00 A. M. and 3:30.

The remainder of my day has been devoted principally to the following activities:

(1) Talking with my neighbors in their homes, in mine, in the roadhouse and in the store.

(2) Playing the phonograph alone and for visitors.

(3) Giving Stanford-Binet Intelligence tests to adults and children and getting them to fill out the Dunlap-Snyder Moral Evaluation questionnaires.

(4) Dancing.

(5) Learning the eskimo language.

(6) Logging.

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Very pleasantly my house has become rather a social center of the community, second only to the roadhouse and the store. I imagine on the average a dozen people drop in to visit every day. Sometimes it's to borrow books, sometimes to hear music, but generally just to talk. Apart from the genuine delight of their companionship, these visits have afforded a splendid opportunity to learn the most intimate beliefs of the members of this fascinating arctic society. Alone with me they quite naturally talk about matters which concern them more personally than the necessarily general discussions of the roadhouse and bit by bit there are being spun out before me dozens of fascinating biographies of thoughtful people, actively aware that they are alive.

In the public roadhouse, as I have said, the discussions are more general. One amazing thing, in contrast to conversation I have heard in every society in which I have been thrown, is that tales of which the narrator is the hero are virtually unknown. Among the lumberjacks whom I studied such talk involved 11 per cent of all the conversation; among many of my introspective friends from New York and Baltimore and Missoula I'm sure it would consume at least 5 per cent. Again it never consists in mock obeisance to the arts by people who really care nothing whatsoever about them. Nor does one hear: "Oh, you haven't you read Point Counterpoint? You must read it really, it's marvelous." If a book or a magazine article is cited in these roadhouse conversations it is always pertinent to the subject under discussion and never, that I have observed, to advertise the quoter's erudition.

But from a positive standpoint, what subjects do these conversations embrace? Here is a sample of the topics discussed during two hours of conversation one evening in the roadhouse. I have made similar notations for a good many evenings but this one will suffice as an illustration.

(1) Vaughn Green gives a recipe for cooking porcupines. "Place the porcupine and a rock in a kettle of water and boil. When the rock gets tender enough to stick a fork in it throw out the porcupine and eat the rock."

(2) Thermometers - are Green or Tycos thermometers better?

(3) The coldest weather ever recorded in the Koyukuk.

(4) Koyukuk is the queerest river in the country in that it never entirely freezes up.

(5) Did Martin kiss Mrs. Dubin? (No says Martin, yes avers everyone else).

(6) The Dubin-Hyde lawsuit of last winter here in Wiseman.

(7) Is it like one big family in the Koyukuk?

(8) Is everyone a trifle crazy?

(9) Lightning.

(10) Forest fires.

(11) Copper resources of the U. S.

(12) Man's waste of natural resources

(13) Matter never can be lost from the world but merely changes to less useful form.

(14) Is there such a thing as the soul?

(15) Pete Radicevitch tells a pornographic story.

(16) Macaroni an exceptionally good food.

(17) Fishing possibilities in the region.

(18) Trail to the Chandalar.

(19) Cabins in the Chandalar Country.

(20) How hard it is to be married to a squaw if you intend to live outside later.

(21) Are the eskimos inferior to the whites.

But merely to recite topics of conversation is a rather dull procedure. Actual verbatim expressions might be of greater interest. Here are a few random ones sprung by these old miners, most of them cut off from the main stream of civilization for 30 or more years.

Billie Gilbert (referring to some hair-splitting) - "That's a distinction without a difference."

Jim Kelly - "Any man can be a cook if he's got a good place to board."

Pete Davey - "I've always been sober whenever I couldn't get something to drink."

Harry Foley - "Worry never made me gray-haired. It was early piety, getting down on my knees in church too much."

Harry (in another vein) - "It's nice to sit on the sidelines and look at life as it goes by and wonder what it's all about."

They describe themselves tersely and fittingly. "Pete has a weather-beaten face like a man who's just come out of a blizzard." "Anything that Kelly can't break is almost unbreakable." "I tell Martin his love affairs are like Caesar - all in the subjunctive mood."

Of their life in here opinions vary.

Martin Slisco says: "Gold mining is the cleanest living you can make. You're not robbing anyone or hurting anyone to get it; you're just taking it clean from nature."

Billie Burke stresses a unique aesthetic side of gold mining. "There's something about gold you love too, like you might love a picture or a statue. I tell you, there's something beautiful about a bunch of nuggets."

Billie Gilbert (who likened Martin to Caesar) is less enthusiastic. "Of course everybody in here has some idiocyncrasies. They wouldn't be in here if they were normal. Outside at least a person has a chance to see something and hear something and learn something even if they're not making any money."

Pete Radicevitch too sees flaws in the life. "Summertime the mosquitos are suicide and wintertime you're always running risk of losing your hands and feet. Still there's something about the imagination makes you like Alaska better every year."

Albert Ness is unqualifiedly enthusiastic. "I have absolutely no desire to go outside. In here we have no police, no press, no church, no priests, no tenements, no big business men, no crimes or any of the other things with which they're cursed outside."

A long hiatus while Old Pat Kellecker came to visit me and stayed for an hour and a half. Pat is 73, blind in one eye, probably the most feeble man in camp. He is apt to drop dead in his hole any day. He is an Irishman, a very pious Catholic, a remarkably well read man. Almost his first remark fits in perfectly with this story.

"This is the greatest thing in the world here to my notion, that man here is his own master. I've gone out and worked 15 hours a day here and it doesn't seem half as long as working 10 hours outside. I imagine a man outside that has to work for wages without any interest in his work is more or less in bondage all the time, there's a touch of slavery about it as I see it."

He then went on to tell me about one James Greelman who

years ago quit one of the big New York dailies because it wouldn't give him a free hand to write what he wanted. He left these lines on his desk, probably familiar to most of you but new to me.

"Oh, happy is he, born and taught,
Who serveth not another's will.
His armor is his honest thought
And simple truth his utmost skill.
That man is free from servile bonds,
Not hope to rise, not fear to fall,
Lord of himself yet not of lands
And having nothing yet hath all."

Pat quoted St. Thomas Aquinas (thought it sounded like Thomas Jefferson to me): "When the government is not fit for the people it is their business to overthrow it."

"The great theologians," he said, "laid out the rules and regulations but if you got a great theologian today he'd be kicked out of his church like Norman Thomas was. Norman Thomas is greater than any minister in the Presbyterian Church today but he was too good for them."

This brings me to the amazing prevalence of socialism in this community. Before the war George Huey once came within 2 votes of winning on the Socialist ticket. Socialism has declined here but today out of the 61 whites in Wiseman no less than 22 are out and out socialists or communists in their economic beliefs. There aren't more than a dozen people in the whole community satisfied with the present economic order. The others might be termed progressives, they jump all over the existing regime but are such rugged individualists themselves that the idea of socialism, sometimes foggily conceived, scares them.

In conversation you hear five derogatory remarks on the existing system to every one supporting it. Here are a few typical ones.

Martin (referring to honors heaped on millionaires for no reason except that they are wealthy) - "Ain't that the terror when they ought to be licked with a big stick with the long tongs on the end."

Pete Radicevitch (a cynical socialist) - "We won't get socialism until people are hungry. Their minds aren't in their heads; they're in their stomachs."

Albert Ness (an optimistic socialist) - "Labor is the only people who are winning today. They're not winning much but little by little they're winning and sometime all of a sudden they're going to get control."

George Huey - "You may see it Bob, and maybe you too Ness, but I'm 75 - still you can't tell, it may come all of a sudden."

Albert Ness - "Yes, it's just like the natives getting feligion - it comes all of a sudden."

But they aren't all as mild as this. Carl Frank, an old German who will be 77 in December and has lived here in the Koyukuk longer than any other white man (since 1898), urges this treatement for the capitalists and all other rulers." Ins Wasser werfen, Kopf abhauen, oder aufhängen."

The feeling against militarism is even stronger than that against capitalism. I haven't yet heard anyone defend it. Here are three typical remarks.

Pete Radicevitch (who had to serve in the Serbian Army before the War) - "You hitch up a horse to a wagon and put bridle on him and whip him to drive him where you want him to go, it's just the same as you put man in army. The rulers, they get the poor producer in the army to kill himself and they wear the nice uniform and roll the mustaches."

Martin Slisco - "My belief is that the United States could make the whole world do what she want them and give up all arms."

Hughie Boyle (who has never seen an auto in his life) - "Always wars are fought for something which could be settled perfectly well peacefully. There never was a war that there was any justification for fighting, to my way of looking at it."

Religious and philosophical beliefs form a very live topic. There was a great debate in here the other night on the immortality of the soul, Aze Wilcox, Pete Radicevitch and Harry Snowden (eskimo) taking the positive side and Martin Slisco and Floyd Hyde the negative. Here was one of Aze's speeches (Aze too has never seen an auto).

"Take the animals, they know where to find trails which haven't been used for years. How can that be? Because they've gotten something handed down to them from their ancestors, some spirit, which tells them where to go. Look how the world has jumped ahead in the last 100 years. It's because one person's spirit goes to the new born one and he gets the benefit of some of what that person knew. Take a great mind like Edison's, he must have gotten the spirit from many men. Of course the person who does isn't conscious of any of this but even so it's true just the same."

Martin Slisco, who can scarcely read or write, had this to say in rebuttal.

"No, I tell you how I figure it. When you die you dead and nothing left only a little dust, maybe a pipeful perhaps. Heaven is the happiness and the content and the health and that you have what you craving for here on earth. Angels are good men

and women, bad men and women are devils. The worst thing in my belief you can do to a man is to take away something he craves for whether he craves for liberty as much as for food."

But Aze wouldn't believe this and cited as infallible proof of some psychic spirit the fact that people are frequently aware when some close relative dies, even though thousands of miles may intervene. To which Martin replied:

"You believe that craziness? It's like that Bill Waah who used to be in here. He got a letter from his wife that she had a kid and he hadn't seen her in five years. But he tell everybody he have dream nine months before that he sleeping with wife and baby must have been born that way by dream. She have two more kids while he gone and he think they born too because he have dream."

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My phonograph has really been a great blessing. In the morning after breakfast I always put on some good snappy jazz records and you can have no idea how pleasantly the drudgery of sweeping or making your bed can be disposed of to the tune of A Room With a View. But dish washing I find is done best to march music, and I notice that of all my band pieces the Washington Post March leaves the dishes the shiniest. In the evening, on the other hand, just before retiring I delight in playing the Hungarian Rhapsody of Liszt, the Bolero, The Ride of the Valkyries and occasionally some of the records of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. The last record for the evening I always put on just before turning out the gasoline lantern and then I listen to it smugly from bed. When the final note is done and the automatic stop has clicked it generally takes me I presume about 30 seconds to fall asleep.

Most fun of all is when friends drop in to listen with me. The second day I had moved in, while I was still setting things in order, I received four callers. Three of them had come to the north country in '98 or earlier, Verne Watts, Poss Postlethwaite and Bob MacIntyre. The fourth was an eskimo, Harry Snowden. With the customary tact of the people of the far north, they didn't mention the real reason they came in which was because they were afraid I might be getting homesick and wanted to cheer me up, but instead made it appear as if they wanted something from me, to hear my new phonograph. I didn't want to be highbrow so I wouldn't risk any of my classical music but instead started off with four Show Boat records. Ol' Man River met with tremendous enthusiasm; it has with everyone here who has heard it. But when I got to Why Do I Love you, and the words "why do you love me?" came out, old Verne, who once when double crossed by a prostitute, was only saved from blowing out her brains by the fact that he had had the fingers of his right hand cut off by a saw so recently that he still instinctively used that hand to grab for his gun, - old Verne opined with a sly smile: "that fellow's taking a lot for granted, isn't he?"

What interested me most on this occasion was Harry Snowden's conduct. He sat through a dozen popular songs with the most complete lack of expression on his face that I can imagine in a human being. His high cheekbones, his protruding lips, his half-closed eyes, his completely immobile countenance might have been a model for some painting of the god of boredom. Then timorously I tried the Bolero and almost at the first notes Harry was completely transformed. He broke into a broad grin and said with great feeling: "That's good, Bob." A little later he muttered: "Gee, that's fine music." At the end he was in ecstacy and exclaimed:

"Gee, isn't there a lot of playing, isn't there a lot of music going on there! Play it again, Bob!"

One evening old Carl Frank brought down some of his classical records. The Pingels came with him and also Floyd Hyde and we started out with a regular concert. Carl had Beethoven's 8th Symphony, which I tried vainly to get in Baltimore, played by the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and reproduced by some German company. Then I reciprocated with Beethovens 5th, then Carl played the Prelude to Meistersinger, to which I responded with the Ride of the Valkyries, Carl played some hymns of Bach, I replied with the Hungarian Rhapsody and Carl came back with the Trompeter von Sackingham. By this time others had come drifting in until there were 13 in the little cabin. Some were obviously getting bored by the heavy music so I swung the evening over to jazz, band music and sentimental pieces like Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms and Springtime in the Rockies which especially appealed to some of these old bachelors. The Blue Danube too was very popular. Many of the old fellows had waltzed to it with some dimly remembered sweetheart forty years before. The El Capitan and Washington Post marches were among the most popular two-step music in the Dawson days of '98 and they too brought a far away look on several faces. Harry Snowden was there and of course I had to put on the Bolero, which was enthusiastically received by almost everyone. It was explained to me how much the Bolero resembles the eskimo music.

After a while some of the home talent was induced to perform. Roy King sang an amusing ditty about "Every nation has a flag but the coon." Old Carl in a surprisingly good voice sang "After the ball is over." Floyd Hyde, youngest white person in camp (27) sang the Marseillaise in a voice which almost lifted the roof, dirt and all, off the house.

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Concerning the psychological tests I've been giving, I'll speak merely statistically because it's too early to draw conclusions. I have given the Stanford-Binet test to 13 adults of whom 10 have been above normal, 4 have made almost perfect scores (i. e. have not missed on more than two tests) and only one has fallen as low as the dull normal class. In the vocabulary part of the examination 8 out of 13 have made as good or better than the standard for superior

adults. This rather surprising result may be attributed, I suppose, to the great amount of reading done in here.

The five eskimo and half-breed children have all been above normal and little Lorraine Green had an I. Q. of 127 which according to Terman would place her among the top 3 per cent of all children. Harry Jonas, aged 6, when I was giving him the vocabulary test which was too hard for him, finally remarked in condemnation: "You do something wrong to me, you make me don't know."

Lest someone should imagine because of these high marks that I do not adhere strictly to the formula in giving the tests or mark too leniently, I will affirm that I'm exceedingly strict and hard-boiled in these respects because I don't know enough to be otherwise. However, the matter of rapport of which the psychologists make so much is all in my favor and indeed there really is no question of rapport with children who have ridden miles piggyback on the examiner's shoulders and playfully delight in pulling his whiskers.

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Now I will take you over to the roadhouse where a dance is going to be held. The tables all have been shoved down to one end against the counter which divides the kitchen from the rest of the house. That leaves a clear floor space of about 20 x 24 feet. The floor consists of planed but unpolished spruce lumber. In one corner near the door is a little shelf on which the portable phonograph which provides the music is sitting. Near by is a table and an unused stove over which the records are scattered. Anybody whom the spirit moves is at liberty to play any record he feels like. Generally the men do this but occasionally a woman has some favorite piece she wants and gets busy.

The women sit on one side of the dance floor, on chairs set between bulky burlap sacks of sugar, flour and beans. After all it is a practical roadhouse first and anyway there's no logical reason why 100 pounds of beans don't make just as fitting an environment for dancing as glittering tinsel. The men recline mostly on the tables and on the counter in front of that part of the roadhouse which is a store and also on chairs squeezed in between. Occasionally a man will sit with the women but not often. There are on the average twice as many male dancers present as females which is a great blessing to the men and should be exhausting to the women, but they seem to be amazingly sturdy.

The women wear neat but not fancy dresses such as one might see on any normal working girl who likes to make a good appearance and has a little money to make it with. They always look clean and usually are fresh. The men are not so particular and come in their normal working clothes: flannel shirts, no tie, badly wrinkled trousers, plain moccasins, such as they use every day along the trail. The women, on the other hand, if they wear moccasins instead of oxfords, always have fancy beading on them.

Now let me introduce you to my dancing partners. First, I'll take you up to Kobuk Mary. She is in the first grade in school, but lest you presume that I am cradle robbing I will also add that her son Willie, aged 8, is in the third grade and her granddaughter, little Mary, aged 5½, is in the same class with her. Old Mary is 48, but like most eskimo women of that age she looks to be 80. Her skin is dry and parchmentlike, she has blue tattoo marks all over her chin. But she is light as a feather on her feet, dances superbly, has a delicate figure something like Peggy Rankin and indeed when I dance Look For the Silver Lining with her I might think it was Peggy if I had more imagination and didn't look down at her.

Her daughter, Tissue Ulen, is a remarkable girl. She is strong as an ox and once in a single day carried 75 pounds for 33 miles over a snowy trail. But she is as quiet and refined as she is strong, and this is all the more remarkable considering that as a girl she used to see her mother, night after night, dancing naked in their cabin at Coldfoot for the amusement of the miners who would get her drunk. When still just a little girl Tissue became pregnant and had a rather horrible experience with a crude abortion. She is now very happily married to Jo Ulen, wireless operator, and has two fine girls, but the effect of her early mishap has been growing worse and she just left a couple of weeks ago for Portland to undergo a uterine operation.

Over here is Mamie Green, shouting some pert remark across the floor to one of the men. She is a contemporary of Tissue's, both are about 22. At the age of 16 she was married to Vaughan Green, deputy U. S. Marshal for the district. He was 47. Since then one of the favorite biennial pasttimes of the Wisemanites has been guessing who might be the father of her child. This has happened three times so far and the only thing which seems certain is that Vaughan has been the father of none of them. But he cheerfully lives the fiction that he has and everybody is happy, most of all Mamie who carries on a flirtation with every white man under 50 in the camp. She herself is half Japanese and half Eskimo with probably some Russian blood. She is of the roly-poly type. (Gee, Vaughan himself just came in to chew the rag at this juncture!) She dances and flirts better than any woman in camp and might fairly be considered the reigning belle of Wiseman.

But not for much longer. Little Lucy Jonas is coming right along. She is only 14 now but in a couple of years she will have the requisite poise and maturity. At present she is very bashful, giggles at every remark for fear of missing some supposedly clever one, pets you continuously through the dance because, I imagine, Mamie told her the men like that, and feels terribly embarrassed when you step on her toes. She is quite the prettiest girl in camp. She is in the fifth grade in school and doing remarkably well considering that six years ago when she came over from the Arctic Ocean she couldn't speak a word of English. In winter she

lives luxuriously in the Jonas Igloo, built of poles and mud and branches, in summer less elegantly beside some moose which her father has shot, the whole family establishing home wherever the animal expires. But all this is so far above the standard of the bleak Arctic Coast that Lucy can hardly believe that that was ever her mode of life and she once exclaimed to me: "Just fancy, living in a snow house!"

Lucy's Mamma, Mrs. Jonas or Kal-habuk as she is called in Eskimo, is built along the lines of a cider jug. She looks young for an eskimo of 33, probably because she has preferred semi-starvation to work. Despite the loss of one eye she is quite good-looking. Considering that she was 27 when she first came among white men she has picked up their dances remarkably well.

That homely little white woman over there is Mrs. Pingel. She dances about as you would expect from an ex-missionary of 63 who took up dancing at the age of 50.

Mrs. Wheeler, the other white woman, is a grandma. She has one paralyzed leg but she drags it gamely through every dance. She says when she can't dance any more she will be ready to die. She has two sons living somewhere along the West Coast and two divorced husbands. She is one of the kindest women in the world, has given the old woman-starved miners of the Koyukuk just the sympathy they needed and has been almost like a mother to the eskimo girls just starting to raise families like Tissue and Mamie. She told me: "I don't believe in charity. I believe in helping people to help themselves. I told Tissue last year I wouldn't sew for her. I'd help her and show her how to do things and correct her when she was wrong, but I wouldn't be in here always and she'd have to learn how to do things for herself."

Knute Ellingson, who has fallen in love with practically every woman, native and white, who has been in the Koyukuk during the past 31 years, had this to say about her in comparison with Mrs. Pingel.

"She's done more for this camp than any woman who's ever been here. To hell with this 'come to Jesus' stuff!"

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One thing I have been digging at quite hard but not hard enough is the eskimo language. My admiration for the mentality of these people, already high, has been augmented when I marvel how any human beings can learn so difficult a language. The vocabulary in every day use seems to be almost infinite. Already I know several hundred words and yet I can scarcely be said to have commenced on the ordinary words which even a little child knows. Everything seems to have a different name for it. In English the front leg of an animal, the hind leg and the human leg are all legs, merely differently modified. In eskimo you have a <u>ta-lik</u>, a <u>mu-nik</u> and a <u>ne-yuk</u>. But if you pronounce the last one <u>nu-yuk</u> you're not saying "leg"at all but "hair."

And that brings me to my next arraignment of the Eskimo, or I should say more accurately the Kobuk tongue. For every tribe has a diff-

erent dialect and the one I am studying is Kobuk. In this language just the slightest mispronunciation may have disastrous effects on your meaning. For example, Kobuk Mary who has been one of my three chief teachers, had a cold in the eyes. I knew that con-no-wit-bit meant "how are you feeling" and I got from one of my other teachers, Harry Snowden, that e-dik meant "eyes." So very proudly I greeted old Mary one morning with con-no-wit-bit e-tik, unconsciously substituting a "t" for a "d". To my chagrin Mary responded with most raucous laughter and told me not to let Harry teach me any more bad words. I finally discovered what my mistake was, that e-tik in king's English (which assuredly wasn't the English used in explaining my error) means "rectum" and that I had gone up to Mary and asked: "How do you feel in the rectum."

But in general things are going more encouragingly. I greet my friends every morning with con-no-wit-bit uv-lavak and every night with con-no-wit-bit uv-novak. I bid them goodbye with mart-nugga-maung-ole-gig-nya, ask for a dance with all-a-luk, thank them for it with koya-runga, offer them a drink of water with ill-witch imir-ach tunge. I can count from a-tor-aic to da-lim-ut kee-berk and occasionally even exclaim pete-a-cher-uk! in obscene exasperation.

I should like to conclude this section on the Kobuk language with another joke on me. It seems the eskimos have a nickname of their own, never complimentary, for every white person in the camp. Mine is Na-pak-tuk lug-lu-nach, given because of my boring into the trees with my increment borer. It is really a swell name for a forester and literally means "tree spoiler!"

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I spent three days in the woods with Martin, helping him cut his winter's fuel supply and incidentally mine, carrying the logs to rollways and more recently hauling it to town by dog team. This was the first real woods work I'd done since the autumn of 1927 when Gerry, John Laney and I logged the Koch Plots at Priest River and it seemed quite exhilarating again even for so clumsy an axeman as I.

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And now, even if this letter weren't as unconscionably long as it is, I'd have to quit it because the dog team has just come in with the first winter mail. A splendid team it is too with seventeen sturdy huskies pulling at the harness. I must go over to the roadhouse and get the latest news.

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The news is all from north of the Yukon. I haven't seen a bit of news other than personal from the outside world in the more than two months I have been in here, with two exceptions. Al Retzlaf sent me a full page from the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner telling of the death of Major General Allen, first white explorer of the Tanana and Koyukuk rivers. It was he, you know, who commanded the Army of Occupation in Germany after the World War. Aside from his splendid early geographical services I admire him as the finest example of what a soldier can be

at the very best. Thanks to the kindness of Major Ahern, I had the great pleasure of taking luncheon last March with the General and enjoyed two hours of delightful conversation.

The other news took the form of a clipping from Dorothy Coggeshall, quoting a very clever letter written by our mutual hero, Mr. Justice Holmes. These two items represent the sum total of my knowledge of what has transpired in the outside world since August 23. Of such vital news as who won the World Series I cannot guess, not even knowing who won the pennants. Of the progress of economic conditions and the terrible unemployment I haven't gotten a hint. On Tuesday two personal friends are up for governor, Elisabeth Gilman and Gifford Pinchot, yet not even the remotest vibrations from the active campaigns I know they have waged have reached me. Strangely enough this lack of news does not trouble me and I don't feel any enthusiasm over the fact that the second-class mail has just come and I can read in the Literary Digest, Time, The Pathfinder and the Nation the news of the past months.

As for first class mail, none arrived this time it having all come two weeks before by the airplane which took the Pingels, Mrs. Wheeler and Tissue away. In that mail I received 34 letters which were a great joy and I hereby want to give general thanks to all the kind senders. Later individual letters will be forthcoming. The next mail arrives here about December 1 and anything which left the East by October 27 will surely catch it.

As ever,

Bob.