

MISSIONARY TO THE ESKIMOS

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*Inuk*¹ is from several different points of view a work of remarkable interest. It is in the first place the story of the fifteen years spent by a French priest as a missionary among the Eskimos; it is in addition a commentary of considerable value on the habits and way of life of a remote and little-known people, and it is also a study in the propagation of the Faith under exceptionally unfavourable conditions.

Father Buliard, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, went to work among the 'copper' Eskimos (the least developed section of this very primitive race) in 1934 only twenty years after the murder of two of his predecessors in the same territory. In the intervening years the work of evangelising the copper Eskimos had been carried on by seven Oblate Fathers working two or three at a time under conditions of physical hardship which are probably unique even in the annals of the Church's foreign missions. The Eskimos are a nomadic people driven by the complementary demands of weather conditions and the quest for food to and fro across a vast territory that is for a large part of the year in semi-darkness, covered in snow and ice and for all but a few days completely devoid of vegetation. They are entirely dependent for food and clothing on a combination of personal skill and chance and their lives are completely dominated by the struggle to provide for the material needs of their families.

It is these conditions, Father Buliard points out, which in large measure determine the Eskimo's basic sense of morality and create the background against which the missionary must work. To the Inuk the virtue that does not kill the caribou is a vice; material success which has so small a place in the Christian way of life has an all-surpassing importance for the Eskimo. Infanticide is, or was, a commonplace event particularly when food is short and the baby is a girl. Little care or attention is 'wasted' on the aged and the existence of women is tolerated only because they are useful as 'igloo-keepers'. Animals like the polar bear are shot for food or, if not specifically for food, because they are a potential danger. By the same token fellow men or women who make no measurable contribution to the common good but on the contrary only consume the hard-won profits of the chase are done away with. It is therefore not surprising that progress in the evangelisation of this people has advanced so slowly. The unexpected uniformity of language among a people with no written and little oral tradition, or indeed continuity of any kind, is an advantage to the missionary, but this is more than offset by the impossibility of

¹ *Inuk*. By Roger Buliard. (Macmillan; 21s.)

staying long with one family or small group of families if the Gospel is to be preached and the Sacraments administered to all. The gains made on one missionary journey are only with the greatest difficulty consolidated and may, by the time the priest goes over the same ground again, be completely reversed as a result of the Eskimo's ingrained materialism, the absence of *any* religious tradition and the unhelpful and at times inimical competition of the shaman.

In *Inuk* Father Buliard paints a vivid portrait of the Eskimo, his way of life and the physical difficulties he has to face (all of which, though Father Buliard makes little of it, the missionary also must meet), and only incidentally touches on the particular problems associated with the propagation of the Church's teaching in so specialised a field. *Inuk* is a remarkable achievement and to expect Father Buliard to have done more than he has done in writing it would of course be ungracious—but one hopes that he may yet write a detailed account of the specifically pastoral aspects of his work dealing with such matters as how the Sacrifice of the Mass is explained to a people to whom wine and, at least until very recently, even bread are completely unknown; how the Gospels, so much of which were written in the idiom of a pastoral and agricultural civilisation, are 'adapted' to the understanding of the Eskimo, and how, for example, the exalted position of our Lady in Catholic teaching strikes the Eskimo with his traditional contempt of women. Brief glimpses of these matters are caught here and there in the pages of *Inuk*, but a more detailed account of them would be of great value; such a study would surely take its place in the tradition of such works as *Revolution in a City Parish*.

REVIEWS

REGULARIS CONCORDIA. Ed. Dom Thomas Symons. (Nelson's Medieval Classics; 15s.)

In the early pages of his study of the Monastic Order in England Dom David Knowles endeavoured to do something to atone for the injustice which he felt had been done by modern historians to the work of monastic revival in the reigns of Edgar and Ethelred. The key figures in this movement were three great bishops, Dunstan, Ethelwold and Oswald, and its chief surviving witness, outside the lives of these saints, a document, the *Regularis Concordia* or Monastic Agreement, written about 970. Only two manuscripts survive, and the edition which Dom Symons has now given us, with economical footnotes, is the first to make use of the older of the two, though the later is taken as a basis. Some will think it a pity that the editor has not given slightly fuller details of his work on the sources of the Monastic Agreement of which he gave some account in three successive numbers of the *Downside Review* in 1941. Except in the larger libraries articles in journals have a maddening way of getting mislaid.