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ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND ESKIMOS

A way to the north of us is a civilization which in many ways differs from our own. Ethel Sage, a pupil of the Sheldon Jackson school of Sitka, Alaska, has written an account of the life of the natives of St. Lawrence Island which is both interesting and instructive. The article appeared in The Verstovian and is as follows:

In the year of 1924 Mr. Nickerson was sent by the Presbyterian church as a missionary to Gambell on St. Lawrence Island and Mrs. Nickerson was sent there as a teacher by the Bureau of Education. I was sent there as Mrs. Nickerson's assistant. The school had an enrollment of fifty-five. The population of Eskimos on that Island was about four hundred.

The beliefs, marriage customs and homes of the St. Lawrence Island Eskimos are entirely different from those of the mainland Eskimos but they have very much the same habits and customs as the Siberian Eskimos.

The Eskimos of the mainland are trying to live more like the white people but white people are not allowed to go to St. Lawrence Island for the winter, except as teachers.

They use the same kind of material for their clothing but they have a style all their own. The women wear blouses like parkas of calico with six inch flounces on the bottom over their deer skin parkas, which comes down to their knees. The deer skin parkas have hoods fringed with dog skin which stands out from their faces. This is the most popular fur for parkas, because in winter the breath does not freeze into icicles upon it. Underneath the parkas the women wear fur suits shaped at the bottom like bloomers. The muk-lucks are different from ours in that they are lined near the top with thick hairy deer skin.

They live differently from the description given in most books. They have houses of walrus skins and those who can afford to buy lumber to build their houses have frame houses. Snow houses are comparatively unknown. Inside the large house is a smaller house covered with grass and skins. This has a deer skin curtain in front with two holes just large enough for a face. These holes are used for ventilation. In this room several families live, eating and sleeping there,

all getting along peaceably. It is so hot and badly ventilated that they often go almost naked while indoors. Every married woman has her own seal oil lamp on which to cook meals. This lamp also furnishes light.

The people live upon the flesh of the seal, the whale, the walrus, and the reindeer, with sugar, tea, and very little bread, which is baked in school. The women cut the boiled meat or frozen meat into small pieces and place it in a wooden bowl. The family sit around in a circle on the walrus skin floor. To eat this they use their fingers in place of forks.

According to their marriage custom the young man has to work six or seven years for his wife before he can marry her and then some times he fails to get her. Polygamy is some times practiced.

The girls and women have been tattoed on their faces and hands to make themselves beautiful as they think.

One of their beliefs is that in every child is the soul of one of its ancestors. Therefore they will never punish their children for fear of insulting some respected grandfather or grandmother. The children are taught not to play with the Eskimo ball made of deer skin filled with reindeer hair just before the hunting season for fear of driving the whales, seal and walrus out from the shore. Before the whaling season opens the men offer sacrifices to the moon by throwing meat into the air.

Several men are witches and their way of trying to cure the sick is by beating the drum and singing a song used especially for this purpose.

In the month of June, while I was there, more than fifty Siberian Eskimos arrived from Gambell to trade and to play games. The first sunshiny morning the men formed a circle and ran around, dropping out of the circle when tired. They wrestled with upper parts of the body bare and threw each other down on the ground. In the evening the midnight sun made the light as bright as day. They had an Eskimo dance in one of the largest rooms. Eight musicians sat in a row, playing drums shaped like tambourines, made by stretching skin tightly over a hoop about two feet in diameter. Each man pounded his drum with a rod

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