



ESKIMOS

OF THE NORTH

by G. W. Rowley

People have all manner of strange ideas about the Eskimos. One of the strangest is that they are a little-known people. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Ever since the Eskimos were discovered, people have been writing about them. There are oodles of general accounts and a fair number of novels. Then there is the continuing flow of books by people who have visited the north and spent varying lengths of time here. These books are an interesting mixture of fact and fiction, of understanding and misunderstanding. The problem is distinguishing the one from the other; so much has been written about the Eskimos that it is easy to lose the perspective.

In fact there are less than 100,000 Eskimos in the world—and nearly 20,000 of these are in Canada. The world population is increasing by about 200,000 every day—or in other words, the number of people in the world increases each day by twice the entire Eskimo population.

Though there are no more than 100,000 Eskimos, they cover an enormous area, the only native people who live in both Asia and America. They live on both sides of the Iron Curtain, spread over four nations. Canada, the United States, the U.S.S.R. and Denmark.

Most Eskimos call themselves "Inuit," which simply means "man." The word 'Eskimo' to describe a member of this race appears to be Algonquin Indian for "raw-meat eater." The word was adopted first by the French in 1611, and later by the English. A race can be defined by its language, its physical type, or by how it lives and thinks. It is rare for these three characteristics to coincide; for instance English is now spoken by many other races as well as the English; many races have a wide variety of physical types; and cultural distinctions are often blurred by borrowing ideas from other peoples. Among the Eskimos, however, all three

characteristics coincide. They have a language spoken by themselves and nobody else; they are a distinctive physical type; and they have a culture uniquely their own.

The Eskimo language appears unrelated to any other. The grammar is complicated, and the meaning of words can be modified by adding suffixes. For instance *tuktu* means "a caribou;" *tuktujuak* is "a big caribou;" *tuktujuakseok* is "hunt a big caribou;" *tuktujuakseokniak*, "will hunt a big caribou;" *tuktujuakseokniakpunga*, "I will hunt a big caribou." Thus one long word in Eskimo can take the place of a whole sentence in English. The most remarkable thing about the Eskimo language is its uniformity over a wide area—an Eskimo from Greenland in the east can make himself understood, though with some difficulty, all the way to Bering Strait, three or four thousand miles away.

Like their language, the physique of the Eskimos is distinctive, too. Like all Mongoloid people they have straight black hair,

