

MEMORANDA CONCERNING THE ARCTIC ESKIMOS IN ALASKA AND SIBERIA.

By JOHN W. KELLY.

[Revised and edited by Sheldon Jackson, D. D., United States General Agent of Education in Alaska.]

The Eskimos on the Arctic coast of Alaska claim to be indigenous to the country in which they live; that they inhabited the mountainous region on the north side of Kotzebue Sound before the surface of the Arctic land was changed and before the northern portion rose from the sea. Their traditions assert that in the beginning the people had heads like ravens, with eyes on the upper part of their breasts, and all the world was wrapped in gloom, with no change of day or night. At that time there lived a powerful chieftain on top of the highest peak. Suspended in the roof of his hut were two balls, which were considered very precious, and were carefully guarded. One day, the chief being absent and the guards asleep, some children, who had long admired the beautiful balls, knocked them down with a stick. They rolled across the floor of the hut, through the door, and down the mountain side. The noise awakened the guards, who hurried out after the escaped treasure. The extraordinary beauty of the bounding balls attracted the attention of the people, who rushed after them. A wild struggle for their possession ensued, which ended in breaking them.

Light sprang from one and darkness from the other. These were mighty spirits. Both claimed dominion and neither would yield. At length a compromise was made, and they agreed to an alternate rule. This was the beginning of day and night. Their violent struggles for the mastery had so disturbed the world that the anatomy of the people and the surface of the earth were changed. Light being upon the earth, men began to catch whales in the sea and to carry the flesh and bones to their mountain home.

One family wandering over the country recently arisen from the sea came down upon what is now called Point Hope. Finding vegetation springing up and whales plentiful, they built a hut, and made it their