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ESKIMO FOOD—HOW IT TASTES TO A WHITE MAN.*

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How the food of the Eskimo, or, indeed, the food of any race, tribe, or people, tastes, depends largely upon the taste, the natural or acquired habits, or most important of all, the appetite at meal-time. The old proverb that "hunger is the best sauce," loses none of its force in Eskimo-land. Having in my time sampled most of the numerous varieties of Eskimo foods,** sometimes for reasons of diplomacy and sometimes out of politeness to kind hosts, and at other times from a scientific curiosity to test the palatability and food value of them all, I have occasionally thought myself qualified as a northern food expert. Some foods I have considered delicacies on the wilderness trail, but later, when trying the same articles at a well-stocked house or ship, the salt seemed somehow to have "lost its savour," and I came to doubt my competence as an unprejudiced witness.

The palatability and delectability of foods, and probably to a certain extent their digestibility, must be judged in connection with the circumstances under which they are consumed. As an example, after accepting the Eskimo dictum that the large Snowy Owl of the north is an excellent game bird, proven by experience to be almost invariably fat, and with clean, white meat more like that of the domestic fowl than any other Arctic bird, and having one served for a morning short order in a white man's camp, we have been obliged to admit that "boiled owl," except for travellers with exceptionally strong teeth and powerful jaws, is not to be recommended as a breakfast food. The prolonged boiling required for an aged owl makes the bird more suitable for an afternoon tea or a supper dish. However, I never knew anybody who had

tried the Snowy Owl to complain of any ill flavour.

What does the Eskimo eat? The home of the Eskimo is beyond the limits of the cultivation of vegetable foods, and consequently in his native state, he is by compulsion very largely a meat and fish-eater. Normally he eats but a few of the watery, rather tasteless Arctic berries (cloudberries, crowberries, alpine bearberries, and occasionally blueberries and cranberries), digs an occasional mess of stringy wild roots, or plucks a few succulent green leaves of sorrel or scurvy-grass. Meat or fish comprise the standard menu. The Eskimo will eat practically anything that walks, flies, or swims (unless there is some local taboo on a particular species or part of an animal), and the food-list embraces a pretty comprehensive list of the fauna of the region. He may be called an all-around practical naturalist or economic biologist.

The Eskimo as a rule lives well, and though seldom corpulent, as a rule is a robust, plump, and well-nourished individual. He knows nothing of the icy terrors of the frozen North—his country is more bounteously supplied with food than the inland wooded country for hundreds of miles to the southward. The Eskimo gets most of the game animals and fish that the northern Indian gets, and in addition to these, has the seals nearly everywhere (and in some parts walrus and whales) to supply in sufficient abundance the blubber and oil, the fatty, heat-producing elements which every one craves in some form in a cold climate, and for which the northern Indian is usually "starving." In these meatless, wheatless, and other kinds of food conservation days, an Eskimo feast of fat, crackly brown caribou ribs roasted, a stew of mountain sheep mutton, or sweet, juicy, boiled caribou tongues, briskets, or hearts, tenderloin or "back-sinew meat" steaks, or even fried seal livers, are not unpleasant

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**Western Eskimo, from Bering Strait, Alaska, to Bathurst Inlet, N.W.T.