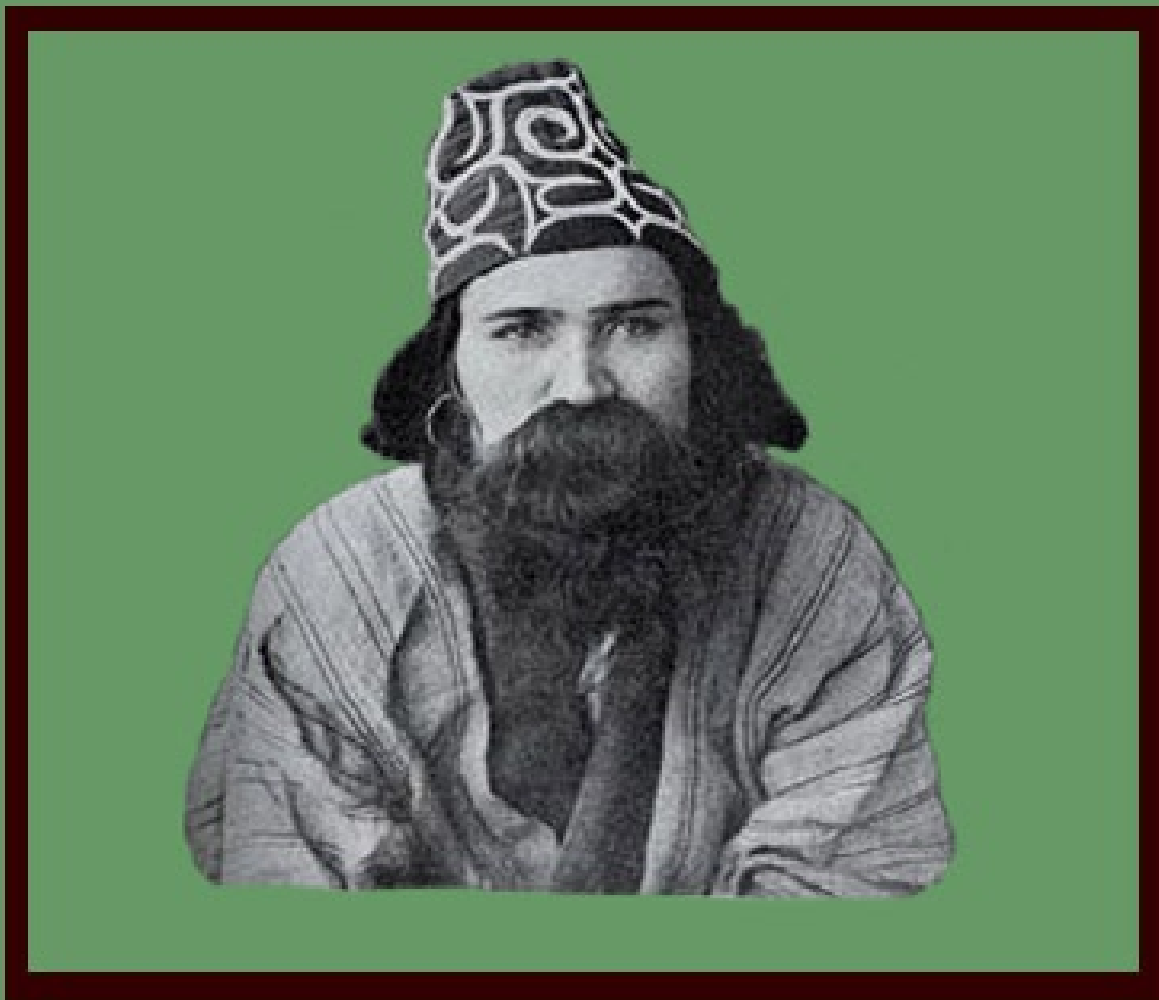


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THE AINUS

Paul Carus

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THE AINUS.

BY THE EDITOR.

ON Yezo, the most northern Island of the Japanese empire, there is living the remnant of a peculiar people, called the Ainus, who are commonly supposed to have been the earliest inhabitants of the whole archipelago. They were not unknown to the Chinese, who in a report of the year 310 A. D. about strange ship wrecked people on their coast, speak of them as *mao jin* or hairy men. When the ruling classes of the present Japanese population, who are probably a mixture of Malay and Hindu, or perhaps Siamese, conquered the country, the Ainus were driven from their original homes, until now they are to be found only in the northern islands, counting a population of not more than 50,000 souls.

The Japanese as a rule look down upon the Ainus as an inferior race, and when Professor Starr went to Japan for the purpose of engaging an Ainu family for exposition at the St. Louis World's fair, the Japanese authorities tried to frustrate the project. His wishes were acceded to only on his promise that he would not fail to impress the truth upon the visitors to the Fair, that the Ainus were not Japanese, but merely subject to the Mikado, and were primitive tribes speaking a language of their own, with their own peculiar customs and institutions.

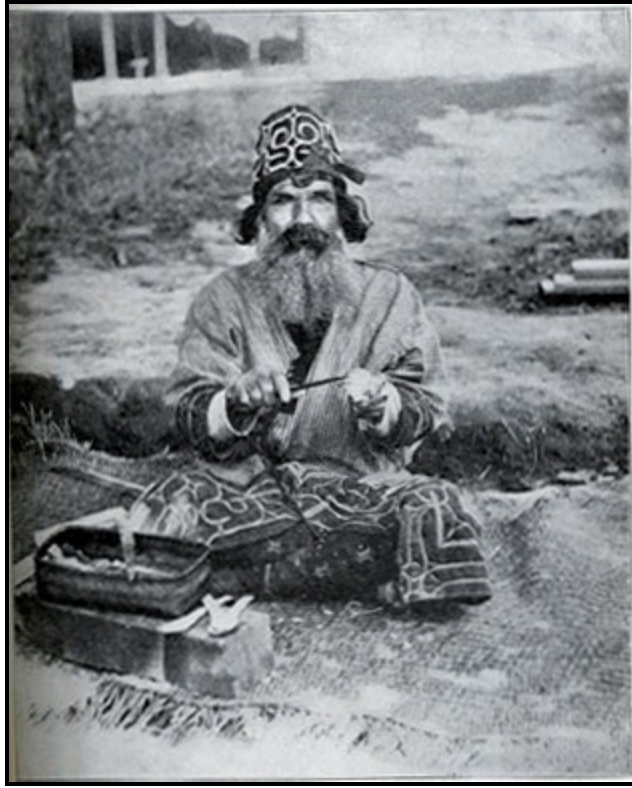
Now it is interesting for us to know that the Ainus are obviously a white race and are nearer kin to the Europeans than any Asiatic races. They seem to have come to Japan from the continent of Asia, and may at a remote prehistoric time have extended over the whole of Siberia. *A priori* it would seem probable that they might be nearest in blood to the Russians --- the most eastern inhabitants of Europe; and if we compare the features of the Ainus with the Russian type we are struck with their remarkable similarity.

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Anthropologists, folklorists, and philologists have so far troubled very little about the Ainus, and the best authority on the subject, so far as we know, is still the Rev. John Batchelor who came to Yezo in 1879 and has worked among the people as a missionary and civilises ever since. We learn from Professor Starr, who met



OLD MAN WHITTLING.

him at his home in the far East, that Mr. Batchelor has ready in manuscript a dictionary of the Ainu language, and it would be very desirable for the interests of anthropology in general to have it published, that students of comparative philology might be given

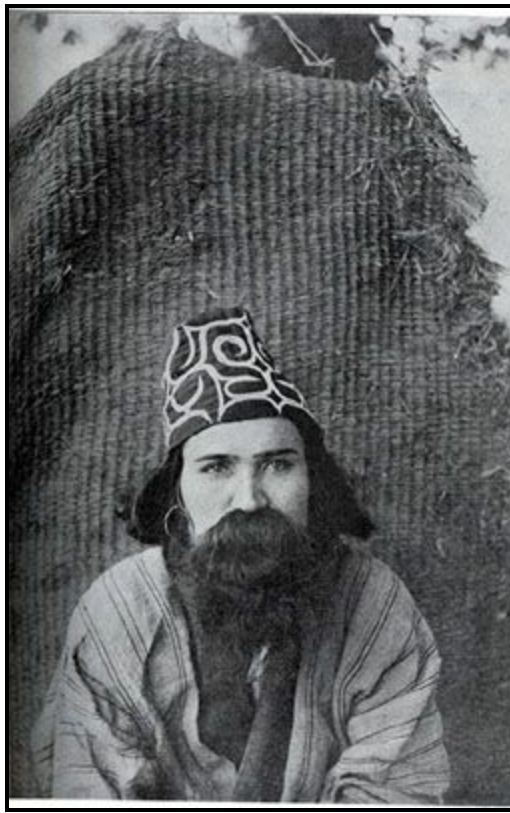
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an opportunity to determine the character of the language and thus see whether or not there is any similarity to the Slavic tongues.

The Ainus, not unlike Russian peasants, are a most inoffensive and peaceable people. They are not rovers but like to remain home, and are good natured and amenable to authority. They become dangerous only when driven to despair by cruel treatment



A TYPICAL RUSSIAN PEASANT.

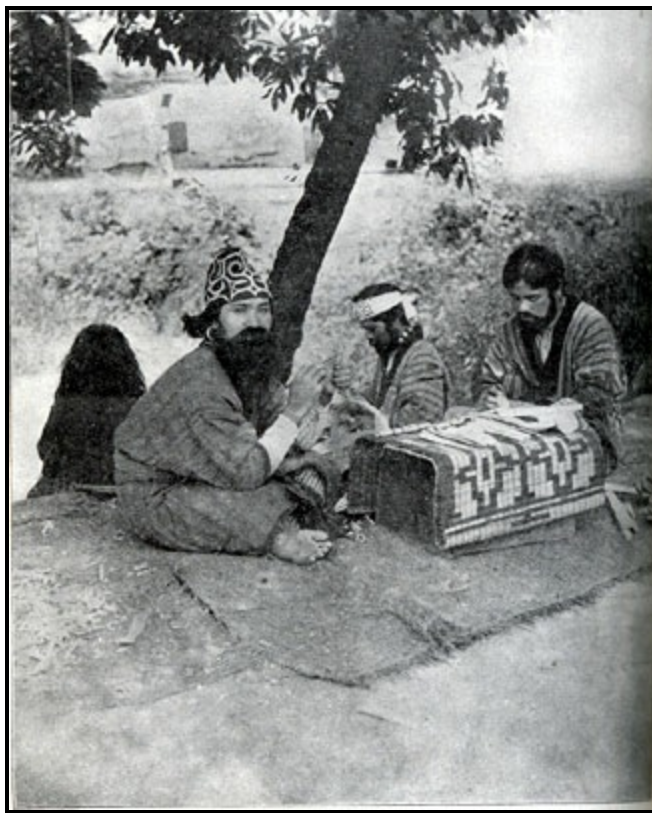


AINU MAN.

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and since the Japanese government is very considerate with them they have rarely proved anything but submissive. They are very industrious, and live mainly by hunting and fishing, but are also fond of weaving carpets, baskets, mats, etc., and are experts at whittling, by this means making spoons, bowls, and other utensils.

The writer of this sketch visited the Ainus at the St. Louis Exposition in the company of Prof. Frederick Starr of the University of Chicago, and Prof. F. W. Kelsey from Ann Arbor. The head of the household was a venerable old man who bore a striking resemblance to the great Russian philosopher Tolstoy, not so much



CARPET WEAVING.

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perhaps, in particular features as in his general appearance. Another Ainu who represented the type of fullgrown manhood, looked like a Russian peasant of the better class, with benevolent features and an almost Christ-like expression in his eye. So far as exterior is concerned, he would certainly be a welcome candidate for the



chief role at Oberammergau. The women among the Ainus are noticeably different and seem to be of a Mongolian type.

Their thatched hut was built exactly like the homes they left in Yezo, of materials brought with them for the purpose, and as we approached it, they greeted us after their native fashion by



AINU MOTHER.

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raising three times both hands, palm upwards, with fingers widely spread, and then gravely stroking their beards downwards. The women who wore tattooed mustaches welcomed us in a peculiar manner which we could not help considering ridiculous, by drawing the first finger of the right hand under the nose, and Professor Starr thought that the artificial beard was probably made for the purpose of enabling them to imitate their husbands' method of greeting.

We discoursed with these amiable children of nature through



MAKING MATS.

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their Japanese interpreter who spoke enough English to make himself understood to us and had full command of Ainu speech. We squatted round the fire over which our hosts baked rice cakes and served tea.

The old man made wood shavings which were curling under his knife. They serve a religious purpose, and he explained to us the orthodox way of making them, although the heterodox way was not so much abhorred as deemed inefficient. At any rate, he did not hesitate to make shavings either way and to reject the heterodox and throw them into the fire as useless.

The shavings are frequently left hanging from the top of the sacred willow-stick, called *inao*, and this gives it something of the appearance of a mop. A large *inao* is kept constantly in the northeast corner of the house whence it is never removed. It is called "the old man," and the Ainus dislike to speak on the subject, and regard it with great reverence. Other *inaos* are set up at places which they wish to consecrate --- at springs, at storehouses, (wherever they expect divine protection. These odd symbols seem to serve as guardians, and are supposed to be endowed with supernatural power. A sacred hedge, called *nusa*, is grown on the east side of Ainu dwellings, and Professor Starr advises foreigners never to meddle with either *inao* or *nusa* (See Starr, *The Ainu Group at the St. Louis Exposition*, pp. 26-28.)

The Ainus are naturally devout, but their religion is so vague that it would be very difficult to give definite explanation of it, for they themselves are probably least fit to be the interpreters of their traditional beliefs. They only follow the precedents established by their fathers, and any one who would

attempt to describe their religion would have to begin with simply a description of their customs, institutions, rituals, and festivals.

Explanations will have to be derived from the data of comparative religion.

It is characteristic of the Ainus that they celebrate festivals



OLD MAN WITH INAO.



in honor of animals, and the most important of these is the bear, which seems to be regarded as an incarnation of the deity who assumes this visible form in order to furnish the Ainus with food and clothing. The reverence with which the bear is regarded, the love with which the cub is raised, and the religious observance with which he is finally eaten, furnishes us with a peculiar parallel to the customs of the Aztecs who feed a representative of the god and finally sacrifice and eat him ceremoniously in a sacramental meal.



AINU HOUSE.

We learn from Professor Starr's little book (pp. 45-50) that the festival is a regular institution among the Ainus. Bear hunting takes place in winter and early spring, and on one of their expeditions they are particularly anxious to capture alive a little bear cub. Mr. Batchelor told Professor Starr that the bear cub was suckled by the women of the village.

"On one occasion, when he was preaching in a house, the little cub was taken into the service and was passed from one woman to another and suckled, in the most matter of fact way. Later on, though no longer suckled, the pet bear is most carefully fed; sometimes the woman will give it a soft morsel with her lips. When the animal is too large to be longer kept in the house and petted, it is put out into a cage, constructed of a cob-web of logs and raised a little above the ground on posts. In feeding it there, a special wooden trough with a handle is used. Formerly the bear was kept two or three years in the village; now one rarely sees a bear more than a year old in the cages. Finally the time for the great ceremonial arrives. Food and drink are prepared in large quantities cakes or dumplings, millet beer, and sakê (Japanese rice brandy). Guests from other villages are invited. Everyone is dressed in their finest clothing. The older and more important men wear their crowns. The men have bathed and

their foreheads and the back of their necks have been shaved and their hair trimmed; bathing, shaving, and hair trimming regularly occur but once a year. Abundance of fresh *inao* are cut. A preliminary feasting takes place, at which the men seat themselves in a semi-circle to the east of the house, facing the *nusa*, near the food and drink, which are placed before them; the women sit behind the men. Presently a man, chosen for that service, goes to the bear's cage, where he salaams and makes an address to the captive. Mr. Batchelor prints one such address, as follows: "Oh, thou divine one, thou wast sent into the world for us to hunt. Oh, thou precious little divinity, ire worship thee; pray hear our prayer. We have nourished thee and brought thee up with a deal of pains and trouble, all because we love thee so. Now, as thou hast grown big, we are about to send thee to thy father and mother. When thou comest to them please speak well of us, and tell them how kind we have been; please come to us again and we will sacrifice thee." Two young men, one on either side, now noose the bear with lassoes and drag him out among the people. Armed with bows and arrows, with blunt, wooden points, they shoot at him to tease and irritate him. Such arrows are not used on any other occasion, and the tips are stained black after which

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ornamental patterns are cut through, to show the white wood beneath; a bit of red flannel is added at the very tip. After being led around for some time, the animal is tied to a stout stake driven into the ground, and the teasing continues. Finally, two young men attack the animal, one seizing it by the ears and head, the other taking it by the hind quarters; a third man rushes up holding a stick by the ends in his hands and forces it between the bear's teeth; four other men seize the animal by his legs or feet and drag them outward until the bear lies sprawling upon the ground. Two long poles are then placed, one under the bear's throat, the other across the nape of his neck. Upon these the people crowd and weigh down to strangle the poor beast. Sometimes a man with a bow and arrow shortens the creature's sufferings by a well directed shot. The bear is then skinned and its head is cut off, the skin remaining attached to it. The skin and head are then laid out upon a nice mat near the east window, and decorated with *inao* shavings, beads, earrings, small mirrors, etc.; a bit of its own flesh is placed under its snout;



ARROW USED IN THE BEAR FEAST.

dried fish, sakê or millet beer, millet dumplings, and a cup of its own meat boiled are offered to it. A worshipper addresses it in some such fashion as this: 'Oh, cub, we give you these *inao*, cakes, and dried fish: take them to your parents and say, "I have been brought up for a long time by an Ainu father and mother and have been kept from all trouble and harm; as I am now grown big, I am come to you. I have also brought you these *inao*, cakes, and dried fish. Please rejoice." If you say this to them, they will be very glad.' Dancing and feasting then ensue. A cup of the animal's flesh has meantime been boiled; after this has been offered to him, a little is given to every person present, even the children. A general feast upon the meat of the bear follows, until practically nothing is left except his bones. The head with its skin attached is then placed upon the *nusa* and left there. In time, through decay and weathering, only the bleached skull remains."