

IN SANTA CLAUS LAND

BY WALTON WILLIAMS
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O. N. LURIE



THE PATIENT REINDEER

AWAY up under the arctic circle is Santa Claus Land. It is the land of ice and snow, of sleds and reindeer, of queer little huts in which live queer little people, the Eskimos. There can be no doubt that this is Santa Claus Land, because the old saint who comes down to the warmer and more lovely lands of all the world every Christmas eve and leaves many gifts for the children is himself dressed in heavy skins and furs, just as the Eskimos dress, and he rides in an arctic sled drawn by swift little reindeer.

Santa Claus Land is very unlike ours. It has no pretty gardens in summer nor any green fields or forests. On the contrary, it is always bleak and barren. The winters are very long and very cold. In the northernmost parts the sun is seldom seen in winter, the night being nearly six months long. The people dwell in huts built of ice and snow during the winter and in tents made of the dried skins of seals and reindeer during the summer. The reindeer supplies them with their only means of "rapid transit" during the long arctic night when the sledge dogs grow sullen and drowsy. It travels in the darkness as well as in daylight and gives rich milk, which may be made into butter or cheese. When slaughtered the reindeer's meat is eaten, and his hide is made into clothing for the Eskimos or stretched over poles and dried for use in making tents.

All the people of Santa Claus Land—men, women and children—are clothed in reindeer skins or sealskins. In summer they wear one suit and in winter two suits. All wear big hoods, called parkas, of fur, and in these hoods the mothers sometimes carry their babies. In certain parts of the frozen regions the babies are carried on their mothers' backs, next to the skin, for warmth, while elsewhere it is the custom to carry the infant about in one of the big deerskin or sealskin boots of the mother.

Reindeer, sure footed and fleet, are the motive power for freight and passenger trains in the great white north. They can travel from 50 to 100 miles a day, drawing laden sleds. In Alaska, which is Uncle Sam's section of Santa Claus Land, there is a reindeer mail and

express sled, which travels ninety-five miles a day all through the winter.

The reindeer was introduced into Alaska only about a dozen years ago by the Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson, who, under the authority of the United States government, brought a small herd from northern Siberia. Since then Dr. Jackson has brought thousands of reindeer into Alaska, and they have multiplied rapidly.

They are now very generally employed in carrying the mail, in the transportation of supplies and in carrying passengers between the various min-

to reach the hut, or igloo, of an Eskimo family.

Eskimo children, however, are by no means lacking in merriment. They have their games, quite different from ours, yet played with just as much zest. One of their favorite games is football, though they play it in a manner quite different from the American college method. The children get a big old glove or boot, stuff it with waste fur or bits of skin, sew up the opening and kick and cuff the crude ball about over the frozen snow in great glee. Eskimo children also indulge in coasting. They use no little sleds, however, but simply slide down the steep snow banks on their knees, which are well protected by the thick deerskin breeches worn by all. Sometimes they tumble over and go down headforemost, but there is seldom any injury to their little bodies, owing to the remarkable thickness and softness of their garments.

Sometimes the Eskimo men step outside the hut into an atmosphere many degrees below zero and enjoy a wrestling match, which keeps them warm enough, no doubt, inside the hut the men and women squat around the fire, telling tales handed down from ancient times or singing quaint songs of folklore.

The Eskimo children, except at one or two points in Alaska, go to no school. But from their infancy they are schooled in the various items of daily labor which it is necessary for all of them to know. They learn how to gather and dry moss, to catch the scant driftwood that comes their way and to extract blubber. These three things are their only fuel. The boys learn how to fish and hunt and the girls, in a crude way, how to cook. One of the chief duties of the women is to tend the soapstone lamps, which both light and heat the huts in which the Eskimos live. These must be well fed with hunks of blubber. The little girls learn lamp tending when they are scarcely old enough to toddle.

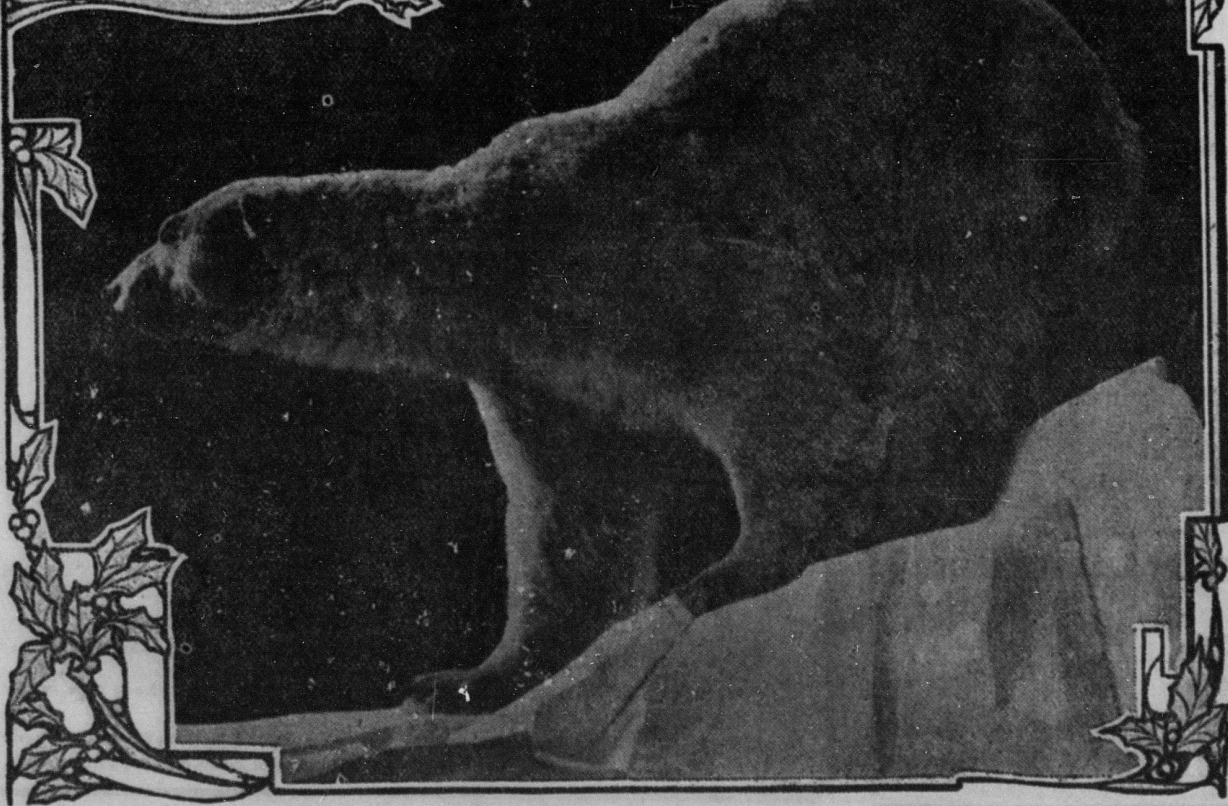
Later they become proficient in the curing of walrus meats and the drying of fish. The girls also learn how to prepare the feathered skins of certain birds for fashioning into soft and comfortable underclothing.



MOTHER AND BABE IN SANTA CLAUS LAND

ing towns and camps. The native Eskimos also find them very valuable as a food and clothing supply. In late years the Christmas tree has been introduced among some of the Eskimos where the Christian religion is taught by missionaries. This makes it very handy for Santa Claus, who lives there, of course, but usually it is a most difficult matter to get the tree. Sometimes a poor little bush is carried hundreds of miles on a reindeer sled

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