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JAPAN'S OTHER ISLAND

(continued from previous page)

serial). To a Hairy Ainu being a Hairy Ainu must be just a plain damn nuisance.

However obscure his origins may be, the Ainu is certainly not Japanese either physically or in temperament: he has either black or brown hair, often wavy, his skin is white or near-white, he has eyes that are certainly not the slant-eyed Mongolian type but are large and deeply sunken, a broad face and shaggy eyebrows. They are known as the Hairy Ainus but they are hairy only compared with the Japanese, and although they grow long beards and seldom cut their hair, looking like a race of dishevelled Robinson Crusoes, they are in fact no more hairy than the average European. Indeed, it would be much more to the point to have them known as the Unwashed Ainus.

Although there are differences of conclusion, many noted anthropologists agree that several thousand years ago the Ainus, a white race, were driven eastward and settled over the whole of Japan and several surrounding groups of islands before the arrival of the first Japanese. Between the two races there was constant friction, and through the centuries the Ainus gradually moved north to avoid being killed out, until about 150 years ago the last of the race had either been killed, absorbed in the Japanese race, or had moved to the almost uninhabited island of Hokkaido, to the near-by and desolate Kurile islands (where a few of them are still reported to be living), and to Sakhalin. They now number about 15,000, and like an insect which adopts the colour of its surroundings for protection, they have adopted to a great degree the habits and ways of the Japanese.

Dirty As Well As Hairy

Left to themselves, even to-day, they are incredibly primitive and simple, and it is easy to believe that they are not far removed from the people of the Stone Age who lived in caves in ancient Europe, and moved from place to place hunting as they went. At least it's a safe bet that they don't wash any more often than did the hairy and grubby men and women of the caves. Although they have a tacit recognition of the master of the house and the leader of the group, there is no social distinction in their occupations; they are all equal in the eyes of man or bear, and there seems to be a communal ownership of goods and food that amounts to a good-natured and uncomplicated socialism.

The Ainus have a spoken but no written language, which probably gives basis to the stories of their fantastic memories; and even to-day (however inadvisable such a move would be) an unwitting visitor could have recited to him, slowly and with telling grimaces, poems of their legendary heroes which are anything up to 10,000 lines. For food they hunt and fish and only reluctantly till the ground. Greatest delight in the lives of the menfolk is the chase; and greatest of all is the bear-hunt into the snowy, jagged mountains, a feat of hardiness and prowess that has led to so many of their folk-legends and traditions.

In his worship the Ainu believes in life after death; he believes, too, that his gods come to earth and that their

spirit is imprisoned in the form of animals, birds, and fishes (as well as inanimate objects like swords and spears). The escape of the gods to eternal peace is not possible until the beast (or bird or fish) has been killed. As the bear is the most noble of all his animals, the dolphin the most noble fish, and the owl the most noble bird, the Ainu believes that it is his duty to release the greatest of the gods from these creatures to allow them to return to the health, wealth, and happiness of the Land of the Gods. This the obliging Ainu reverently proceeds to do whenever possible; and the greatest occasion is the killing of the bear (letting loose the Mountain God), an occasion which entails the most important of festivals, with great merrymaking, the wearing of traditional clothes, the drinking of crude wine, and the eating of the bear flesh which the Mountain God has left behind in thoughtful magnanimity.

Fact As Against Fiction

So much for the stories. They are so much more attractive on paper. Having read the legends and traditions, wondered about this "racial island," and seen in *Life* the most magnificent photographs of their picturesque living (we were told that it took two days, four radio valves, and half a gross of cans of sweetened condensed milk for the *Life* photographer to get his pictures posed), we eagerly went to an Ainu village.

Our first call was to the house of the leader of the village. Yes, there was the roughly-built shanty of a house; outside were playing about seven Ainu children and—success, our study was justified—they had round eyes deeply sunken, black and brown wavy hair, and broad faces. Heaped in the doorway was a sack of onions and these we climbed over. Through the open door we saw a room with a mud floor which was damp and filthy. Asleep on the floor with his mouth open through a straw-broom of beard was the chief. In the corner sat his wife squatting on the floor; she was listening attentively to a handsome radio on a mantelpiece that was bellowing a jazz tune from what we heard a minute later was the United States special services station at Sapporo. Both were dressed in most filthy khaki that was obviously ex-American army. When the woman saw us she roused her husband and they both rushed from the room. Ah, the shyness of the primitive we thought, but now almost without hope. Within minutes they were back, dressed in their traditional robes, with beads and ornaments swinging, and with khaki showing through the folds. From a full sack in the corner they extracted a handful of small bears which had been hand-carved obviously on the communal lathe; and we established international fellowship by buying two of these wretched trifles at exorbitant prices. We examined the beads, shuddered at the filth, took a photograph, shouted our thanks against the blaring of the radio, and left. Out of sight of those round, deeply sunken eyes we shouted with laughter.

(To be Concluded.)