

ture; according to their own account, they all lived on fish, waterfowl, and eggs, with a change in the spring to the soft tips of reeds and rushes, but never a taste of bread. At that time, and still more in earlier days, the number of Loplik fishermen was many times as great as the present total population of two hundred and fifty. The diminution, according to their own story, is due to the gradual drying up of the rivers and lakes, and the consequent decrease in the number of fish. Part of the people have moved away, so they say; part have died of small-pox. They fear this disease so intensely that when any one is supposed to be ill with it, they put food beside him, and then flee to a new village, abandoning their reed houses, and even their scanty furniture.

At Abdal, I was quartered in the single mud house among a dozen reed huts. The kindly people, knowing of our approach, and perchance thinking of the vast hoards of money supposed to belong to all Sahibs, had chopped a hole through a foot or two of ice, and caught some fish. I asked to have them cooked and served in Loplik fashion. Presently the mistress of the house appeared with a steaming bowl of fishy unsalted water.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Why, that’s the way you wanted it — our way. We always drink the water that the fish have been boiled in.”

I omitted the Loplik first course that day, though the boiled fish were excellent.

The fact that a woman should set food before a strange man showed that Mohammedan law is not strictly observed here. The greater freedom of home life was refreshing. It was like a breath from the west when a girl of twelve, who