

Woman Reviews

Poetry Book

By RUTH KILCHER

Homer, Alaska

When Louise Gore writes about Eskimo Life before the advent of the white man it has the ring of authenticity. Careful research has gone into her work of 80 poems.

Some are pragmatic, concerned with the business of living: hard at times and cruelly harsh,—joyous and comical at others. Some tell about the relationship between man and woman, man and animal, and man and nature.

All are saying in simple language what needs to be said. This deceptive simplicity together with an often chantlike rhythm, conveys the impression that the poems are a direct translation from REAL Eskimo poetry, a rendition seemingly once removed—as it were—but fittingly and beautifully so. You have the feeling: this is the way the Eskimo would have written about themselves, had they written poetry.

What better criteria than this? Mrs. Gore seems to have listened to thoughts expressed by the ancient first immigrants to the North: to the hunter outwitting Nannuk, the polar bear, or Netserk the seal; to the sorrowful acceptance of the young mother, exposing her soft-cheeked daughter to the cold elements.

"The meat that feeds you now my child, will keep some man from dying. I go to do the village leaders ruling," she says, while beyond the village "in the hills, the hungry wolves are calling."

The young man about to take a wife, one whose soft hair "shines as the shine of ravens wing" and whose industry "the beaver is slow to match" comes into sharp focus. And you too feel the compassion of the egg hunter with the "wailing, wary purple-throated loon" who will have no downy young this year.

If what Robert Graves said is true: that the mark of true poetry are the goosepimples you get while reading it, then "Soul of the Bearded Seal" hits that mark many times.

And who could have said it better, giving us the essence of Eskimo life, interpreting the soul of a unique people, than Mrs. Gore, a prize winning poet several times, and recently named one of the ten top poets in the State of Alaska.

The slender volume will be a handsome jewel on your shelf of favorite books and often referred to. It will make a lovely and appropriate gift to special friends here and abroad.

The book includes a glossary of Eskimo terms, both unfamiliar and familiar. Some, like kayak, parki, beluga or baleen, have been adopted into the English language already, others might follow. But if you want to find out what giviak is, who Nivikkaa might be, what it means to be trapped in the saugsat, and what type of hunting quasas-iomaq is, then "Soul of the Bearded Seal" will tell you.