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ESKIMO LIFE

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

GREENLAND AND THE ESKIMO

Greenland is in a peculiar manner associated with Norway and with the Norwegians. Our forefathers were the first Europeans who found their way to its shores. In their open vessels the old Vikings made their daring voyages, through tempests and drift-ice, to this distant land of snows, settled there throughout several centuries, and added it to the domain of the Norwegian crown.

After the memory of its existence had practically passed away, it was again one of our countrymen[1] who, on behalf of a Norwegian company, founded the second European settlement of the country.

It is poor, this land of the Eskimo, which we have taken from him; it has neither timber nor gold to offer us—it is naked, lonely, like no other land inhabited of man. But in all its naked poverty, how beautiful it is! If Norway is glorious, Greenland is in truth no less so. When one has once seen it, how dear to him is its recollection! I do not know if others feel as I do, but for me it is touched with all the dream-like beauty of the fairyland of my childish imagination. It seems as though I there found our own Norwegian scenery repeated in still nobler, purer forms.

It is strong and wild, this Nature, like a saga of antiquity carven in ice and stone, yet with moods of lyric delicacy and refinement. It is like cold steel with the shimmering colours of a sunlit cloud playing through it.

When I see glaciers and ice-mountains, my thoughts fly to Greenland where the glaciers are vaster than anywhere else, where the ice-mountains jut into a sea covered with icebergs and drift-ice. When I hear loud encomiums on the progress of our society, its great men and their great deeds, my thoughts revert to the boundless snow-fields stretching white and serene in an unbroken sweep from sea to sea, high over what have once been fruitful valleys and mountains. Some day, perhaps, a similar snow-field will cover us all.

‘THE BOUNDLESS SNOW-FIELDS STRETCHING CALM AND WHITE FROM SEA TO SEA’

Everything in Greenland is simple and great—white snow, blue ice, naked, black rocks and peaks, and dark stormy sea. When I see the sun sink glowing into the waves, it recalls to me the Greenland sunsets, with the islets and rocks floating, as it were, on the burnished surface of the smooth, softly-heaving sea, while inland the peaks rise row on row, flushing in the evening light. And sometimes when I

see the sæter-life[2] at home and watch the sæter-girls and the grazing cows, I think of the tent-life and the reindeer-herds on the Greenland fiords and uplands; I think of the screaming ptarmigan, the moors and willow-copses, the lakes and valleys in among the mountains where the Eskimo lives through his brief summer.

But like nothing else is the Greenland winter-night with its flaming northern lights; it is Nature's own mystic spirit-dance.

Strange is the power which this land exercises over the mind; but the race that inhabits it is not less remarkable than the land itself.

The Eskimo, more than anyone else, belongs to the coast and the sea. He dwells by the sea, upon it he seeks his subsistence, it gives him all the necessaries of his life, over it he makes all his journeys, whether in his skin-canoes in summer, or in his dog-sledges when it is ice-bound in winter. The sea is thus the strongest influence in the life of the Eskimo; what wonder, then, if his soul reflects its moods? His mind changes with the sea—grave in the storm; in sunshine and calm full of unfettered glee. He is a child of the sea, thoughtlessly gay like the playful wavelet, but sometimes dark as the foaming tempest. One feeling chases another from his childlike mind as rapidly as, when the storm has died down, the billows sink to rest, and the very memory of it has passed away.

The good things of life are very unequally divided in this world. To some existence is so easy that they need only plant a bread-fruit tree in their youth, and their whole life is provided for. Others, again, seem to be denied everything

except the strength to battle for life; they must laboriously wring from hostile Nature every mouthful of their sustenance. They are sent forth to the outposts, these people; they form the wings of the great army of humanity in its constant struggle for the subjugation of nature.

Such a people are the Eskimos, and among the most remarkable in existence. They are a living proof of the rare faculty of the human being for adapting himself to circumstances and spreading over the face of the earth.

The Eskimo forms the extreme outpost towards the infinite stillness of the regions of ice, and as far, almost, as we have forced our way to the northward, we find traces left behind them by this hardy race.

The tracts which all others despise he has made his own. By dint of constant struggle and slow development, he learnt some things that none have learnt better. Where for others the conditions which make life possible came to an end, there life began for him. He has come to love these regions; they are to him a world in which he himself embodies the whole of the human race.[3] Outside their limits he could not exist.

It is to this people that the following pages are devoted.

The mutual resemblance of the different tribes of Eskimos is no less striking than their difference from all other races in features, figure, implements and weapons, and general manner of life.

A pure-bred Eskimo from Bering Straits is so like a Greenlander that one cannot for a moment doubt that they belong to the same race. Their language, too, is so far alike that an Alaska Eskimo and a Greenlander would probably,

after some little time, be able to converse without much difficulty. Captain Adrian Jacobsen, who has travelled both in Greenland and in Alaska, told me that in Alaska he could manage to get along with the few words of Eskimo he had learnt in Greenland. These two peoples are divided by a distance of about 3,000 miles—something like the distance between London and Afghanistan. Such unity of speech among races so widely separated is probably unique in the history of mankind.

The likeness between all the different tribes of Eskimos, as well as their secluded position with respect to other peoples, and the perfection of their implements, might be taken to indicate that they are of a very old race, in which everything has stiffened into definite forms, which can now be but slowly altered. Other indications, however, seem to conflict with such a hypothesis, and render it more probable that the race was originally a small one, which did not until a comparatively late period develop to the point at which we now find it, and spread over the countries which it at present inhabits.

If it should seem difficult to understand, at first sight, how they could have spread in a comparatively short time over these wide tracts of country without moving in great masses, as in the case of larger migrations, we need only reflect that their present inhospitable abiding-places can scarcely have been inhabited, at any rate permanently, before they took possession of them, and that therefore they had nothing to contend with except nature itself.

The region now inhabited by the Eskimos stretches from the west coast of Bering Straits over Alaska, the north coast

of North America, the North American groups of Arctic Islands, the west coast, and, finally, the east coast, of Greenland.

By reason of his absolutely secluded position, the Eskimo has given the anthropologists much trouble, and the most contradictory opinions have been advanced with reference to his origin.

Dr. H. Rink, who has made Greenland and its people the study of his life, and is beyond comparison the greatest authority on the subject, holds that the Eskimo implements and weapons—at any rate, for the greater part—may be traced to America. He regards it as probable that the Eskimos were once a race dwelling in the interior of Alaska, where there are still a considerable number of inland Eskimos, and that they have migrated thence to the coasts of the ice-sea. He further maintains that their speech is most closely connected with the primitive dialects of America, and that their legends and customs recall those of the Indians.

One point among others, however, in which the Eskimos differ from the Indians is the use of dog-sledges. With the exception of the Incas of Peru, who used the llama as a beast of burden, no American aborigines employed animals either for drawing or for carrying. In this, then, the Eskimos more resemble the races of the Asiatic polar regions.

But it would lead us too far afield if we were to follow up this difficult scientific question, on which the evidence is as yet by no means thoroughly sifted. So much alone can we declare with any assurance, that the Eskimos dwelt in comparatively recent times on the coasts around Bering

Straits and Bering Sea—probably on the American side—and have thence, stage by stage, spread eastward over Arctic America to Greenland.

It is in my judgment impossible to determine at what time they reached Greenland and permanently settled there. From what has already been said it appears probable that the period was comparatively late, but it does not seem to me established, as has been asserted in several quarters, that we can conclude from the Icelandic sagas that they first made their appearance on the west coast of Greenland in the fourteenth century. It certainly appears as though the Norwegian colonies of Österbygd and Vesterbygd (*i.e.* Easter- and Wester-district or settlement) were not until that period exposed to serious attacks on the part of the 'Skrellings' or Eskimos, coming in bands from the north; but this does not preclude the supposition that they had occupied certain tracts of the west coast of Greenland long before that time and long before the Norwegians discovered the country. They do not seem to have been settled upon the southern part of the coast during the first four hundred years of the Norwegian occupation, since they are not mentioned in the sagas; but it is expressly stated that the first Norwegians (Erik the Red and others) who came to the country, found both in the Easter- and the Wester-districts ruins of human habitations, fragments of boats, and stone implements, which in their opinion must have belonged to a feeble folk, whom they therefore called 'Skrellings' (or 'weaklings'). We must accordingly conclude that the 'Skrellings' had been there previously; and as such remains were found in both districts, it seems that they could

scarcely have paid mere passing visits to them. It is not impossible that the Eskimos might simply have taken to their heels when the Norwegian viking-ships appeared in the offing; we, too, found them do so upon the east coast; but it does not seem at all probable that they could vanish so rapidly as to let the Norwegians catch no glimpse of them. The probability is, on the whole, that at that time the permanent settlements of the Eskimos were further north on the coast, above the 68th degree of north latitude, where seals and whales abound, and where they would first arrive on their course from the northward[4] (see p. 13). From these permanent settlements they probably, in Eskimo fashion, made frequent excursions of more or less duration to the more southerly part of the west coast, and there left behind them the traces which were first found. When the Norwegian settlers began to range northwards they at last came in contact with the Eskimos. Professor G. Storm[5] is of opinion that this must first have happened in the twelfth century.[6] We read in the 'Historia Norvegiæ' that the hunters in the unsettled districts of north Greenland came upon an undersized people whom they called 'Skrellings,' and who used stone knives and arrow-points of whalebone. As their more northern settlements became over-populated, the Eskimos no doubt began to migrate southwards in earnest; and as the Norwegians often dealt hardly with them when they met, they may eventually have taken revenge in the fourteenth century by first (after 1341) attacking and devastating (?) the Wester-district, and later (1379) making an expedition against the Easter-district, which seems in the following century to have been entirely destroyed.[7] It was

about this time, accordingly, that the Eskimos probably effected their first permanent settlements in the southern parts of the country.

There is evidence in the Eskimo legends as well of the battles between them and the old Norsemen. But from the same legends we also learn that there was sometimes friendly intercourse between them; indeed the Norsemen are several times mentioned with esteem. This appears to show that there was no rooted hatred between the two races; and the theory that the Eskimos carried on an actual war of extermination against the settlers seems, moreover, in total conflict with their character as we now know it. Thus it can scarcely have been such a war alone that caused the downfall of the colony. We may, perhaps, attribute it partly to natural decline due to seclusion from the world, partly to absorption of the race, brought about by the crossing of the two stocks; for the Europeans of that age were probably no more inaccessible than those of to-day to the seductions of Eskimo loveliness.

As to the route by which the Eskimos made their way to the west coast of Greenland there has been a good deal of difference of opinion. Dr. Rink maintains that after passing Smith’s Sound the Eskimos did not proceed southwards along the west coast, which would seem their most natural course, but turned northwards, rounded the northernmost point of the country, and came down along the east coast. In this way they must ultimately have approached the west coast from the southward, after making their way round the southern extremity of Greenland. This opinion is mainly founded upon the belief that Thorgils Orrabeinsfostre fell in

with Eskimos upon the east coast, and that this was the Norsemen's first encounter with them. I have already, in a note on the preceding page, remarked on the untrustworthiness of this evidence; and such a theory as to the route of the Eskimo immigration stands, as we know, in direct conflict with the accounts given in the sagas, from which it appears (as above) that the Eskimos came from the north and not from the south, the Wester-district having been destroyed before the Easter-district. It appears, moreover, that we can draw the same conclusion from an Eskimo tradition in which their first encounter with the old Norsemen is described. In former days, we are told, when the coast was still very thinly populated, a boatful of explorers came into Godthaab-fiord and saw there a large house whose inhabitants were strange to them, not being Kaladlit—that is, Eskimo. They had suddenly come upon the old Norsemen. These, on their side, saw the Kaladlit for the first time, and treated them in the most friendly fashion. This happened, it will be observed, in Godthaab-fiord, which was in the ancient Wester-district—that is to say, the more northern colony. There is another circumstance which, to my thinking, renders improbable the route conjectured by Dr. Rink, and that is that if they made their way around the northern extremity of the country, they must, while in these high latitudes, have lived as the so-called Arctic Highlanders —that is, the Eskimos of Cape York and northwards—now do; in other words, they must have subsisted chiefly by hunting upon the ice, must have travelled in dog-sledges, and, while in the far north, must have used neither kaiaks nor woman-boats, since the sea, being usually ice-bound,

offers little or no opportunity for kaiak-hunting or boating of any sort. It may not be in itself impossible that, when they came further south and reached more ice-free waters again, they may have recovered the art of building woman-boats and kaiaks, of which some tradition would in any case survive; but it seems improbable, not to say impossible, that after having lost the habit of kaiak-hunting they should be able to master it afresh, and to develop it, and all the appliances belonging to it, to a higher point of perfection than had elsewhere been attained.

The most natural account of the matter, in my opinion, is that the Eskimos, after crossing Smith’s Sound (so far there can be no doubt about their route), made their way southwards along the coast, and subsequently passed from the west coast, around the southern extremity of the country, up the east coast. It is impossible to determine whether they had reached the east coast and settled there before the Norsemen came to Greenland. On their southward journey from Smith’s Sound they must, indeed, have met with a great obstacle in the Melville glacier (at about 77° north latitude), which stands right out into the sea at a point at which the coast is for a long distance unprotected by islands. But, in the first place, they may have been able to make their way onward in the lee of the drift-ice; and, in the second place, this difficulty is at worst not so great as those they must have encountered in passing round the northern extremity of Greenland. Moreover, the passage in an open boat from Smith’s Sound southward along the west coast of Greenland to the Danish colonies has been several times accomplished in recent

years without any particular difficulty. In opposition to this theory it may, no doubt, be alleged that the East Greenlanders possess dog-sledges, which are not used on the southern part of the west coast, where there is not enough ice for them. But if we remember with what rapidity, comparatively speaking, the Eskimos travel in their women-boats, and how fond they were in former times of roaming up and down along the coast—and when we take into account the fact that from time immemorial dogs have been kept along the whole of the west coast—this objection seems to lose its weight.

The Eskimos are at present spread over the whole west coast of Greenland, right from Smith’s Sound to Cape Farewell. On the Danish part of the west coast they number very nearly 10,000. On the east coast, as we learn from the account of the Danish woman-boat expedition of 1884-85, under Captain Holm, there are Eskimos as far north as the Angmagsalik district (66° north latitude), their numbers in the autumn of 1884 being in all 548. Further north, as the Eskimos told Captain Holm, there were no permanent settlements so far as they knew. They often, however, made excursions to the northward, possibly as far as to the 68th or 69th degree of latitude; and a year or two before two woman-boats had sailed in that direction, and had never been heard of again. It is uncertain whether there may not be Eskimos upon the east coast further north than the 70th degree of latitude. Clavering is known to have found one or two families of them in 1823 at about 74° north latitude; but since that time none have been seen; and the German expedition which explored that coast in 1869-70, and

wintered there, found houses and other remains, but no people, and therefore assumed that they must have died out. The Danish expedition of 1890 to Scoresby Sound, under Lieutenant Ryder, reports the same experience. It therefore seems probable that they have either died out or have abandoned this part of Greenland. This does not seem to me absolutely certain, however. There may be small and confined Eskimo colonies in these northern districts, or there may be a few nomadic families whom no one has as yet come across. This portion of the east coast must, in my opinion, be quite specially adapted for Eskimo habitation, as it is very rich in game. It therefore seems to me strange that when once the Eskimos had arrived there they should have gone away again; nor does it seem probable that they would die out in so excellent a hunting-ground. If there are Eskimos upon this north-east coast, their secluded position, debarring them from all intercourse, direct or indirect, with the outer world, must render them, from an ethnological point of view, among the most interesting people in existence.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

APPEARANCE AND DRESS

As I now sit down to describe these people, at such a distance from them and from the scenery amid which we lived together, how vividly my first meeting with them, upon the east coast of Greenland, stands before my mind’s eye! I see two brown laughing countenances, surrounded by long, coal-black hair, beaming, even amid the ice, with bright contentment both with themselves and the world, and full of the friendliest good-humour, mingled with unaffected astonishment at the appearance of the marvellous strangers.

The pure-bred Eskimo would at first glance seem to most of us Europeans anything but beautiful.

He has a round, broad face, with large, coarse features; small, dark, sometimes rather oblique eyes; a flat nose, narrow between the eyes and broad at the base; round cheeks, bursting with fat; a broad mouth; heavy, broad jaws; which, together with the round cheeks, give the lower part of the face a great preponderance in the physiognomy. When the mouth is drawn up in an oleaginous smile, two rows of strong white teeth reveal themselves. One receives the impression, upon the whole, of an admirable chewing apparatus, conveying pleasant suggestions of much and good eating. But, at the same time, one traces in these features, especially in those of the women, a certain touch of ingratiating petted softness.

To our way of thinking, such a face could scarcely be described as beautiful; but how much prejudice there is in our ideas of beauty! I soon came to find these brown faces, gleaming with health and fat, really pleasing. They reflected the free life of nature, and suggested to my mind pictures of blue sea, white glaciers, and glittering sunshine.

It was, however, chiefly the young that produced this impression; and they soon grow old. The shrunken, blear-eyed, hairless old women, reminding one of frost-bitten apples, were certainly not beautiful; and yet there was a certain style in them, too. Toil had left its traces upon their wrinkled countenances, but also a life of rude plenty and a habit of good-humoured, hopeless resignation. There was nothing of that vitreous hardness or desiccated dignity which the school of life so often imprints upon aged countenances in other parts of the world.

The half-caste race which has arisen upon the west coast, of mingled European and Eskimo blood, is apt to be, according to our ideas, handsomer than the pure-bred Eskimos. They have, as a rule, a somewhat southern appearance, with their dark hair, dark eyebrows and eyes, and brown complexion. A remarkably Jewish cast of countenance sometimes appears among them. Types of real beauty are by no means rare—male as well as female. Yet there is apt to be something feeble about these half-breeds. The pure-bred Eskimos undoubtedly seem more genuine and healthy.

It is a common error among us in Europe to think of the Eskimos as a diminutive race. Though no doubt smaller than the Scandinavian peoples, they must be reckoned among

the middle-sized races, and I even found among those of purest breeding men of nearly six feet in height. Their frame produces, on the whole, an impression of strength, especially the upper part of the body. The men have broad shoulders, strong, muscular arms, and a good chest; but, on the other hand, one notices that their thighs are comparatively narrow, and their legs not particularly strong. When they get up in years, therefore, they are apt to have an uncertain gait, with knees slightly bent. This defective development of the lower extremities must be ascribed, for the most part, to the daily confinement in the cramped kaiak.

A noticeable physical characteristic of the women appeared to me to be their comparatively narrow hips, which we are apt to regard as inconsistent with the type of feminine beauty. They certainly seemed to me considerably narrower than those of European women; but it is hard to say how much of this effect is to be ascribed to difference of dress. The Eskimo women, however, are remarkable for their very small and well-formed hands and feet. Their physique, as a whole, strikes one as sympathetic and pleasing.

The complexion of the pure-bred Greenlander is of a brownish or greyish yellow, and even among the half-breeds a certain tinge of brownish yellow is unmistakable. This natural darkness of the skin, however, is generally much intensified, especially in the case of men and old women, by a total lack of cleanliness. As an indication of their habits in this particular, it will be sufficient if I quote the concise description given by our very reverend countryman, Hans

Egede, of the method of washing practised by the men in particular: ‘They scrape the sweat off their faces with a knife.’

The skin of new-born children is fair, and that not merely because they have not yet had time to grow dirty. Hans Egede Saabye noted long ago in his Journal[8] that children have on the small of their back a bluish-black patch, about the size of a sixpenny piece, from which the dark colour of the skin seems to spread as they grow older. Holm makes a note to the same effect in his account of the east coast.[9] I cannot speak on the subject from personal observation. It is perhaps worth noting that something similar is related of Japanese children.

Most of my readers have probably formed some idea of the Eskimo costume from pictures (see Frontispiece). They are probably aware that its most noteworthy peculiarity lies in the fact that the women dress almost like the men. Their costume is certainly very much prettier and more sensible than our ugly and awkward female fashions.

In South Greenland the men wear upon their body what is called a *timiak*. It is made of bird-skins, with the feathers or down turned inwards, is shaped very much like our woollen jerseys, and, like them, is drawn over the head. The timiak is provided with a hood, used as a head-covering in the open air; at other times it is thrown back, and forms, with its upstanding selvage of black dog-skin, a sort of collar round the neck. At the wrists, too, the timiak is edged with black dog-skin, like a showy fur overcoat among us. Above the timiak, an outer vest (*anorak*) is worn, now for the most part made of cotton. Trousers of seal-skin, or of European

cloth, are worn upon the legs; on the feet a peculiar sort of shoes, *kamiks*, made of seal-skin. These consist of two layers, an interior sock of skin with the fur turned inwards, and an exterior shoe of hairless, water-tight hide. In the sole, between the sock and the outer shoe, is placed a layer of straw or of bladder-sedge.[10] Into these kamiks the naked foot is thrust.

The costume of the women closely resembles that of the men. In South Greenland a bird-skin jacket is worn upon the body, which has, however, no hood to cover the head, but instead of it a high upstanding collar edged with black dog-skin, which is made to glisten as much as possible; and outside this collar a broad necklace of glass beads is often worn, radiant with all the colours of the rainbow. The wrists, too, are edged with black dog-skin. The cotton vest above this garment is of course as brightly coloured as possible, red, blue, green, yellow, and round its lower edge there generally runs a broad variegated band of cotton, or, if possible, of silk. Trousers are worn on the legs, generally of mottled seal-skin, but sometimes of reindeer-skin. They are considerably shorter than the men’s trousers, coming only to a little way above the knee, but are richly decorated in front with bright-coloured embroideries in leather, and white stripes of reindeer-skin or dog-skin. The kamiks are longer than those of the men, and come up to above the knees; they are generally painted red, but sometimes blue, violet, or white. Down the front of them is sewn a band of many-coloured embroidery.

Besides the garments above-mentioned, there is another, used by women who are nursing children. It is called an

amaut, and resembles an ordinary anorak, except that at the back there is a great enlargement or pouch, in which they carry the child all day long, whatever work they may be about. As the amaut is lined both inside and out with reindeer- or seal-skin, this pouch makes a nice warm nest for the child.

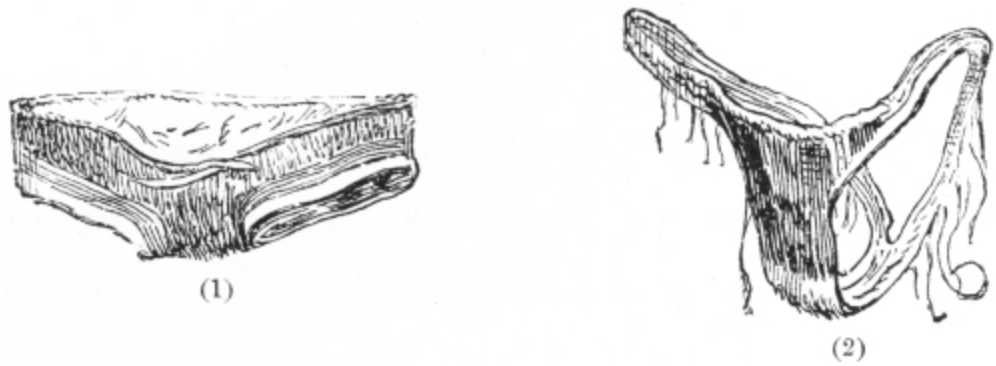
As no fashion-paper is published in Greenland, fashions are not so variable among the Eskimos as they are with us. Even in this respect, however, they are no mere barbarians, as the following example will show:

In former times, the women's anoraks and jackets were as long as the men's; but after the Europeans had imported the extravagant luxury of wearing white linen, they felt that such a wonderful tissue was far too beautiful and effective to be concealed. Instead, however, of cutting away their bodices from above, like our beauties at home, they began below, and made their anoraks so short that between them and the trouser-band, which was allowed to slip right down on the hips, there appeared a gap of a hand's breadth or more, in which the fabric in question became visible. A somewhat original style of 'low dress,' this.

The Eskimos of the east coast wear costumes practically similar to those here described, only that they almost always use seal-skins instead of bird-skins for their jackets. In North Greenland, too, seal-skin and reindeer-skin are greatly used for these garments, and the same was the case in earlier times all along the west coast.

On the east coast, a surprising habit prevails; to wit, that in their houses and tents, men, women, and children go about entirely naked—or so, at least, it seemed to me.

Balto, however, no doubt after closer examination, assured me that the grown men and women had all a narrow band around their loins, a detail which my bashfulness had prevented me from discovering. This remarkable observation of our friend Balto is corroborated by the majority of travellers who have undertaken researches on the subject, so I am bound to believe them. This band, which the travellers are pleased to designate under-drawers —how far it deserves such a name I will leave to the reader to judge from the accompanying illustration—is, I am told, called *nâtit* by the Greenlanders.



GREENLAND INDOOR DRESS (EAST COAST).
(1) Male costume. (2) Female costume.

In former days this simple indoor garb was worn all over Greenland, right up to the northernmost settlements on Smith’s Sound, where, indeed, it is still in use.

This light raiment is, of course, very wholesome; for the many layers of skins in the outdoor dress greatly impede transpiration, and it is therefore a natural impulse which leads the Eskimo to throw them off in the warm rooms, where they would be particularly insanitary. When the Europeans came to the country, however, this free-and-easy custom offended their sense of propriety, and the missionaries preached against it. Thus it happens that the national indoor dress has been abolished on the west coast. Whether this has led to an improvement in morality, I cannot say—I have my doubts. That it has not been conducive to sanitation, I can unhesitatingly declare.

The Eskimos, however, are still very unsophisticated with respect to the exposure of their person. Many women, it is true, make some attempt to conceal their nudities when a European enters their houses; but I greatly fear that this is rather an affectation which they think will please us, than a result of real modesty; and when they discover that we are not greatly impressed by their attempts, they very soon

give them up. In regard to their own countrymen they show very little sense of modesty.

The hair of the Eskimos is coal-black, coarse and straight, like horsehair, and is allowed by the men to grow wild. On the east coast they usually do not cut it at all, even regarding it as dangerous to lose any of it; they keep it back from the face by means of a band or thong. Sometimes they take it into their heads to cut the hair of children, and the children so treated must continue all through their lives to cut their hair, and must also observe certain fixed formalities in the matter; for instance, they must cut the ears and tails of their dogs while they are puppies. Iron must on no account come in contact with the hair, which is, therefore, sawn off with the jawbone of a Greenland shark.

The women knot their hair in a tuft upon the crown of the head. This they do by gathering it tightly together from all sides and tying it up, on the east coast with a thong, on the west coast with ribbons of various colours. Unmarried women wear a red ribbon, which they exchange for green if they have had a child. Married women wear a blue, and widows a black ribbon. If a widow wants to marry again she will probably mingle a little red with the black; elderly widows, who have given up all thought of marriage, often wear a white ribbon. If a widow gives birth to a child, she too must assume the green ribbon.

Her top-knot is the pride of the Greenland woman, and it must stand as stiff and straight up in the air as possible. This is, of course, held especially important by the young marriageable women, and as they are scarcely less vain than their European sisters, they draw the hair so tightly

together that it is gradually torn away from the forehead, the temples and the neck, whence they often become more or less bald while still comparatively young. This does not add greatly to their attractiveness, but is, nevertheless, a speaking proof of the vanity of human nature.

In order to get the hair thoroughly well knotted together, and at the same time to give it the glistening appearance which is prized as a beauty, they have furthermore the habit of steeping it in urine before doing it up, thus making it moist and easier to tighten.

Mothers lick their children instead of washing them, or at least did so in former days; and as to the insects they come across in the process, their principle is, ‘They bite, therefore they must be bitten.’

If any should be offended by these peculiarities in the manners and customs of the Greenlanders, they ought to reflect that their own forefathers, not so many generations ago, conducted themselves not so very differently. Let them read the accounts of the domestic life of the Teutonic peoples some centuries ago, and they will learn many things that will surprise them.

CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

THE ‘KAIAK’ AND ITS APPURTENANCES

A superficial examination of certain details in the outward life of the Eskimo might easily lead to the erroneous conclusion that he stands at a low grade of civilisation. When we take the trouble to look a little more closely at him, we soon see him in another light.

Many people nowadays are vastly impressed with the greatness of our age, with all the inventions and the progress of which we daily hear, and which appear indisputably to exalt the highly gifted white race far over all others. These people would learn much by paying close attention to the development of the Eskimos, and to the tools and inventions by aid of which they obtain the necessaries of life among natural surroundings which place such pitifully small means at their disposal.

Picture a people placed upon a coast so desert and inhospitable as that of Greenland, cut off from the outer world, without iron, without firearms, without any resources except those provided by Nature upon the spot. These consist solely of stone, a little drift-wood, skins, and bone; but in order to obtain the latter they must first kill the animals from which to take them. We, in their place, would inevitably go to the wall, if we did not get help from home; but the Eskimo not only manages to live, but lives in contentment and happiness, while intercourse with the rest of the world has, to him, meant nothing but ruin.

In order that the reader may realise more vividly upon what an accumulation of experiences the civilisation of this people rests, I shall try to give a sketch of the way in which we must conceive it to have arisen.

Let us, then, assume that the ancestors of the Eskimos, according to Dr. Rink’s opinion, lived in long bygone ages somewhere in the interior of Alaska. They must at all events have been inlanders somewhere and at some time, either in America or in Asia. Besides being hunters upon land, these Eskimos must also have gone a-fishing upon the lakes and rivers in birch-bark canoes, as the inland Eskimos of Alaska and the Indians of the North-West do to this day. In course of time, however, some of these inland Eskimos must either have been allured by the riches of the sea or must have been pressed upon by hostile and more warlike Indian tribes, so that they must have migrated in their canoes down the river-courses toward the western and northern coasts. The nearer they drew to the sea, the more scanty became the supply of wood, and they had to hit upon some other material than birch-bark with which to cover their canoes. It is not at all improbable that before leaving the rivers they had made experiments with the skins of aquatic animals; for we still see examples of this among several Indian tribes.

It was not, however, until the Eskimo encountered the rough sea at the mouths of the rivers that he thought of giving his boat a deck, and at last of closing it in entirely and joining his own skin-jacket to it so that the whole became water-tight. The kaiak was now complete. But even these inventions, which seem so simple and straightforward

now that we see them perfected—what huge strides of progress must they not have meant in their day, and how much labour and how many failures must they not have cost!

COVERING A KAIAK

Arrived at the sea-coast, these Eskimos of the past soon discovered that their existence depended almost entirely upon the capture of seals. To this, then, they directed all their cunning, and the kaiak guided them to the discovery of the many remarkable and admirable seal-hunting instruments, which they brought to higher and ever-higher perfection, and which prove, indeed, in the most striking fashion, what ingenious animals many of us human beings really are.

The bow and arrow, which they used on land, they could not handle in their constrained position in the kaiak; therefore, they had to fall back upon throwing-weapons.