

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF EXTREME NORTH-EASTERN LABRADOR

By BERNHARD HANTZSCH

TRANSLATED BY M. B. A. ANDERSON

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The independence of the growing youth thrives with increasing ability. Their age is not reckoned. In most cases there is an insufficient numerical system. The ambition of the young man is now directed towards owning the necessary fishing and hunting gear, a kayak, etc. If his father is still alive and an industrious hunter, this is not too difficult for the son; otherwise he does not get on in the world so easily. If he can at last look after his own support, if he has not too many duties toward his mother and brothers and sisters and is developed physically and mentally enough, then no special difficulties are put in his way to establish a new household. For a long time he has known all about the few growing girls in the vicinity. At times even the parents and relatives have allotted both parties to each other when children.

The capacity of the girls for marriage does not depend upon a certain age, but their physical development and their domestic ability. They flirt with each other in a rather uncouth way [P. 289] and then at last without much ceremony the union is consummated. Until a few years ago the young man had to give the father of the girl rather valuable articles, in order to become a fully authorized married man, that is, a large number of skins, hunting gear, dogs, or other things. This custom, which has now been stopped had as a consequence the fact that fathers who were avaricious or in great poverty occasionally sold their daughters when they were too young. Mrs. Lane in Killinek told me of a case, where a man had acquired a child, about six years old, and she had died as a result of the treatment she had received. Among these people of nature there thus occur unnatural crimes, without a punishing hand to avenge innocence. In this respect, however, the Eskimos are already known. (Compare O. Peschel, *Völkerkunde*, Leipzig, 1885, p. 420.) As a rule the girls marry at the age of 15-20 years, the men from 17-25 years, but they have often made the more intimate

acquaintance of the other sex beforehand. The sensuality of the people is great, and of all the transgressions which the missionaries at the mission stations have to reprove, those against the sixth commandment are by far the most frequent. I shall not enter into any discussion for and against. From an anthropological standpoint the circumstances may of course be defended. In general unguarded young people seem to unite, as soon as desire and capacity become strong enough. Usually there are no consequences immediately, and even if there are, they are married sooner or later. Illegitimate children are no disgrace among the heathen, but do not seem to occur frequently, because the girls as a rule soon find a husband. Mothers of 13-14 years, who have not yet attained their own growth, are said to occur once in a while. With their strongly moral viewpoint which, however, is not free of prejudice, the missionaries preach zealously against the immorality of youth. But in the confined life they lead together, the slight feeling of modesty toward each other, with their susceptible nature and the lack of idealistic, mental occupations, it is difficult to educate the people to chastity beyond a certain degree.

The early motherhood of a girl not yet fully developed is said to cause no disgrace and it is claimed even makes childbirth easier. No educated white man, however, possesses exact knowledge concerning the love life of the population, the missionaries least of all. He would have to enter completely into the life of the people, and should not feel above them, in order to study these most intimate relations. In the presence of strangers the people are reserved and decorous toward one another. Only by chance do you obtain information concerning their relations with one another.

The contract of marriage ensues as a rule from exterior motives. The division of work between the sexes makes life together a necessity, but it incites each party to a vigorous development of the knowledge and skill required of him. Only a married person has the reputation of being of full value; for a clever, industrious girl soon finds a husband, a valiant hunter and fisherman soon finds a wife. Unmarried older persons are incompetent people, and are looked down upon as such. Spiritual affection between married people does not exist as a rule. Here is to be seen the

superficiality of the Eskimo character. Unselfish love, unchanging loyalty, are not known. When now and then scenes of jealous rivalry occur among the men, the reason is in sensual passion, especially when there is a shortage of women. The Eskimo is quite reasonable and practical, even animal-like, even if he displays a slight degree of feeling in all other relations of life. This makes it so difficult for the missionaries to exert any lasting influence on soul and will. The female sex does not have a low standing at all, as is the case with so many tropical peoples. Wise old women know how to gain for themselves real independence and high regard in family and community, but young married men are said to be brutal and frequently violent, and to strike their wives oftener than their children. If she has parents or brothers, then she does not permit this to happen too frequently, but some day leaves secretly in order to seek refuge with her relatives. [P. 291]. In such a case she takes perhaps an infant and usually any daughters also, while she leaves the boys with the father. The pair are often soon reconciled. But if a quarrel breaks forth again they separate anew. My somewhat stubborn companion, Paksau, had an independent wife of the same disposition, who was living with her relatives at Auklatsivik at the time of my stay in Killinek. The incompatible pair had already separated several times, and had been reconciled again. But this time Paksau showed no inclination of yielding; for when we were at New Plauen and I asked him to sail over to Auklatsivik with me, he refused with grim laughter. He was living in Killinek with his half-sister, who was very kind to him. Since the woman was baptized in Rama as a Christian, the missionary, Mr. Waldmann, would not permit their living together, and threatened to banish Paksau from the station, if he did not fetch back his rightful wife and send away his sister. The people told me that they were all related to one another, and did not always know who was their true father. Exchange of wives and other customs seem to have been the order of the day until recently. For example the housewife is said to have been regularly given to the strange guest and the missionary, Mr. Perrett, told me a story of how one of the wisest of the Killinek men, who could even read a little, told him that he no longer had any desire to give his wife always to the overnight guests. Marriage is as a rule monogamous. With the looseness of the marriage tie this mode of action may be the best, because the individual number of the sexes in general is about the same. Moreover it is difficult for the man to provide more than one wife along with

their children with food and clothing, especially as too much work is not popular. It is said there have been industrious hunters, who owned two or even more wives, especially at a time when the first wife aged more quickly than the husband. But after the introduction of the activity of the missions in the district the days of allowed polygamy are numbered. In 1906 only the oldest man in the community had two wives, who [P. 292] because he had become half blind and feeble, had to do more for his support, than he did for theirs. The restraint of Christian moral commands may be broken more in secret at present, especially by widowed persons, and persons whose other married half is incapable of sexual intercourse because of illness or other circumstances; the worst consequence of such conduct occur through abortions, purposely caused in order to keep the missionaries in ignorance of these affairs. It can hardly be doubted that the population is approaching its decline more quickly because of the artificially limited intercourse of the sexes.

The members of the rather limited relationship usually stay together, and live fairly near each other, even in the same tent or house. They then often use larger possessions not needed for personal use in common, but the oldest man has a sort of deciding voice and chief claim. If, for example, a strange traveller has received services from a group of Eskimos or bought articles from them, then the payment is usually made to the head of the family, who according to his opinion of their worth then pays the other individual men. They also share with one another when hunting and trapping. This proceeding is practical for each person, because the results of the hunt are not always to be depended on even if all cleverness is employed. It incites the activity of efficient people to care zealously for the common good and thereby win prestige among their associates, but indeed at times it promotes laziness and wastefulness on the part of some people, who know, of course, that in the end they will be provided with clothing, food and a dwelling. An awkward and lazy person is of course looked down upon and often is treated badly, but he is not easily allowed to perish entirely. The single family preserves a certain independence in spite of the closely united way of living of the relationship. Every married woman cares for her own oil lamp if possible, and prepares the food for her own family. For instance it made quite an impression on me, when I was sitting in the evening with three or four families in the large tent and the wife of the eldest man [P. 293] was the first to light a wood fire perhaps in order to bake a flour cake in the pan. When she had

finished with this in ten or fifteen minutes and placed it in a corner of the tent, the second wife began the same work, etc. Worthy married men will also perform such work in place of their wives in case these are busy with their infants or otherwise engaged. In spite of the division of work the men are somewhat experienced in woman's work, since they have to look after themselves alone on hunting trips, often for a long time. Besides, they still know how to start a fire by the quick turning of a pointed stick of soft wood in the cavity of a piece of hard wood and starting plant-cotton or fine dry moss to burning. Usually though, they use the matches distributed by trade quite generally, of which many are used, especially for the lighting of tobacco pipes.

After the joys and work of the day they go to their rest at an indefinite hour in the evening and also not always at the same time. They usually take off all their clothing, and hang it up, if it is damp, or if not damp, use it for a pillow, especially in cramped quarters. As already remarked, the high platform covered with caribou skins, in the back part of the room serves as a bed. The mother takes the infants to her breast; larger children and the father find a narrow place at her side. They cover themselves with caribou skins, which are in many cases sewed together. So they all sleep peacefully near one another, their heads turned toward the entrance, often so crowded that they can hardly turn round. But this disturbs them little in their peaceful sleep. Larger boys often have a special sleeping place at the side of the living room, perhaps in order that they may not so easily disturb the peace and order of the house. Strange guests are very often accommodated in this way. Taking off all their clothing and covering themselves merely with skins has the consequence that the sleepers may be cold in severe cold weather. Therefore if possible the oil lamp is allowed [P. 294] to burn during the night, and it is the duty of the housewife to wake up occasionally, to reach out towards the lamp which is placed not far from her head, to clean the moss wick with a small piece of wood or bone lying near and to trim it right and thus contribute light and warmth in the sleeping room. They like the darkness still less than the cold, for which reason only in times of want do they deny themselves the comfort of primitive lighting and heating. If a bear or other creature is lured thither by the glow of the light, and wishes to pay the inhabitants a visit, then the dogs outside raise a great racket and prevent unwelcome surprises. It is plain to be seen, that the air in the inside of the sleeping room, especially in winter,

assumes a character that is not inviting to our noses. As long as the people still live in the tent, sufficient ventilation is provided by the wind blowing in from outside. When the tent entrance has been closed loosely, I have seen people lying in sleep half-uncovered, while the wind blew across them and covered them with fine snow dust. This manner of sleeping used mostly by the Killinek people at the present time, looked at from the natural standpoint, has many advantages. It makes possible the perspiration of the body, hardens the body through contact with the air, grants the greatest utilization of the cramped sleeping room and in addition affords the advantage of mutual warmth in lying close to one another. It has indeed often been proved by Arctic travellers, that sufficient warmth for the body is developed only by lying close beside one another in an unclothed state during severe cold weather without. One may be convinced that the century old customs of the Eskimo population represent the result of experiences suitable for those cold regions. To be sure the Christian missionaries perceive in this manner of spending the night a great temptation to actions, which considered from our rules of conduct are immoral, and therefore try to accustom their members to greater modesty and reserve. As a result I observed in the case of some of the especially "moral" Eskimos that they [P. 295] did not undress at all, but lay down to sleep in all their clothing, a thing which is in no way advisable from a hygienic viewpoint. I thought then of my stay in Iceland, considered as Christian and quite educated, when I had lived repeatedly in peasant houses away from the main road, in which in the evening the family with the servants undressed in the common room, and as many as six persons lay down in the same bed. In both districts, so different as to population, the same reasons may have led to quite similar arrangements. If the missionaries were at the same time physicians or naturalists, they would perhaps be of a different opinion about the morality or immorality of the natives. The feeling of embarrassment towards one another must be dulled, when at times the severe cold of winter makes even the most private functions impossible outside of the common living room.

If illness breaks out in the family the cure is usually left to nature, if there are no white people near at hand whose advice can be asked for. The sick man rests and is hungry, if conditions are such that he has to stay away from his work. It is often very hard for the little children when the mother is not able to put them to bed and care for them at home, but often is compelled to carry

them about in her hood even if very ill. The only child in the community which had been baptized in a Christian manner, a girl of about two years, died in my arms, after its mother had brought it in the severe cold half dead into the mission house. The legs and lower part of the body were cold already, the eyes dim; the last rattling breath showed the condition the child was in clearly enough. Adult persons, who are lying down in the house, are cared for as well as possible, without anyone troubling himself in particular about them; they act from duty and custom, but far removed from any sentiment. However abundantly they use the more or less suitable remedies from the missionaries they do not yet understand how to make use of the native products as medicines except in a slight measure. In long and severe illnesses they often try to help by sorcery, a custom which is indeed on the decline on account of the teachings of the missionaries. I could not learn much concerning the methods used since the people were too shy to give any information about it. Persons of both sexes practice such magic, especially old women. Such exciting scenes as are carried on by the sorcerers (*Angakok*, plural *Angakut*) of other heathen Eskimo bands for the last six or eight years have apparently not occurred in these districts. Incantation against sickness consists, at present, merely of an endless chanting of monotonous songs and occasionally of theatrical performances on the part of the *Angakok*. With these some magic objects, such as skulls of animals, bones, amulets, play a part and occasionally direct influences on the body of the sick man, such as massages and movements of the limbs are practiced. Imagination, superstition, and the mysteriousness of the affair, perhaps even direct hypnotic suggestion may now and then influence the course of the sickness favourably. The persons who have a reputation for sorcery are known in part to the whites. The mother of my companion, Paksau, had a reputation as a successful healer, but she was reticent and afraid, and I could learn nothing from her. I had only once the opportunity of being present at an incantation which was conducted quietly and carried on as Christianity. One evening I visited the three tents of five married brothers from Ablorilik, intelligent men and instructed in Christianity. While I sat by the fire with six or eight persons, I was called suddenly into the neighbouring tent, where the youngest of the brothers rested on the bed as pale as a corpse. As I then ascertained, he was suffering apparently from cramps of the heart, this time so bad that they feared his death. I did not know anything to do for such a bad case and with lack of any medical knowledge and

remedies except to regulate the circulation of the blood by simple massage and applications. Still more did I hope that my actions with the sick man would quiet him and would influence him favourably thereby. While I knelt on the caribou skins near the young man, whose wife had already gone to rest, [P. 297] and lay there most of the time rather indifferent, so that I had to motion to her to move somewhat to the side, the other adults assembled whispering in the tent. The oldest of the brothers, who could read a little and had received a New Testament from the missionary, Mr. Waldman, sat down near me and began to read aloud a passage, which had been underlined for such purposes. He repeated the verse countless times, while the others present frequently spoke the last words after him in a chorus. This lasted for about an hour. If I had not seen the book, I should have believed I was present at a heathen incantation, and I am of the opinion that it was not much else. When at last the sufferer breathed quietly again, his heart action became regular, and he spoke quietly and peacefully, I arose to go home, whereupon the sitting was broken up generally and they prepared to go to sleep. Resigned calm toward such trials of life seldom deserts these people. I did not see a look of real concern or sympathy, even when the only child of a young mother died; her face was as sad and troubled as I had ever seen an Eskimo countenance before, but not a tear came to her eyes. Scarcely had the child given its last sigh, when she brought water and soap, washed its whole body, as if she were handling something living, and then the affair was apparently finished for her. After a few days her round face was beaming as before. But when sometime later we sat opposite one another in a boat, and our glances met, she suddenly became serious; we were both thinking of the young thing, that had had to die so soon.

As quickly as possible a dead person is taken outside. After the body becomes cold they do not like to come in contact with it. There seem to be no special ceremonies at the present time in the case of deaths. The tent, in which the death occurred is usually taken down, in order to put it up again elsewhere; a snowhouse is deserted entirely. In a wood or sod house on the other hand it is usually considered enough to give it a thorough airing. [P. 298] At the present time the missionaries care for burial in a Christian manner near the mission station. A place which has enough deep earth for the purpose is located a few minutes walk above the mission building. In 1906 there were just three graves in this little cemetery. In the winter the dead are occasion-

ally concealed temporarily in the snow or put in a snow-house for protection from animals. The old heathen custom, which is still followed on journeys, is in short the following. They place the dead, fully clothed or sewed in skins, on a level place near the sea, but so high, that the high tide cannot reach it. Now they erect about it a stone wall, which is covered over at the top with large stone slabs. The mound which arises does not touch the body lying at full length. Often at the foot of the grave, occasionally at the side of it, they erect an additional grave, which is meant for the reception of the smaller possessions of the deceased. The larger possessions are placed nearby, but at the present time the Eskimos keep most of these themselves. Often the old stone graves are disturbed by

people, animals, or the influence of the weather, so that it is difficult to find a well preserved skeleton or interesting material.³⁴

(To be continued)

³⁴ For lack of space I omit more detailed accounts here, since in the transactions and reports of the Royal Zoological and Anthropological-Ethnographical Museum at Dresden, Volume XII, 1908, pp. 55-58, I have given more detailed notes concerning the heathen burial customs and the report on anthropological collections in north-eastern Labrador on the basis of perhaps forty graves examined by me, and of the material which is now in the above-mentioned Museum. Two illustrations produced from my photographs of well-preserved stone graves are published with the article. (Cf. "Eskimo Stone Graves in North-Eastern Labrador and the Collection of Anthropological Material from Them." Translated by M. B. A. Anderson from "Über Eskimo-Steingräber in nordöstlichen Labrador und das Sammeln anthropologischer Materialien aus solchen," *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Kgl. Zoologischen und Anthropologisch-Ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden, Dresden, Volume XII, 1908, pp. 55-58. The Canadian Field-Naturalist, 44:11, 1930.*]

EXCURSIONS OF

The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, 1932

Do not collect any specimens except for scientific purposes.

It is the aim of the Club to foster the study of all branches of natural history on these excursions. On every occasion, groups will be formed to study botany, birds, insect life, geology, minerals, pond life, general zoology, etc. At the commencement of the excursion, particular items of interest peculiar to the locality will be explained, so that members and visitors will have an opportunity of devoting special attention to particular subjects when desirous of doing so alternatively to general natural history. Leaders will be provided for as many groups as occasion demands.

MAY 7—McKay Lake and vicinity. Take Rockcliffe O.E.R. car, and meet at terminus at 3 p.m.

LEADERS—Dr. E. M. Kindle, Mr. Hoyes Lloyd and others.

MAY 14—Britannia-on-the-Bay. Meet at the O.E.R. terminus at Britannia at 3 p.m.

LEADERS—Mr. Herbert Groh, Miss M. E. Cowan and others.

MAY 21—Fairy Lake vicinity. Take Hull Electric Railway car at Chateau Laurier for Wrightville at 2.30 p.m.

LEADERS—Dr. Ralph De Lury, Mr. C. E. Johnson and others.

MAY 28—Val Tetreau. Take Hull Electric Railway car at Chateau Laurier at 2.30 p.m. for Val Tetreau, and meet at Monument, bottom of Main Street.

LEADERS—Dr. F. J. Alcock, Mr. G. A. Miller and others.

JUNE 4—National Museum of Canada. By invitation of the Director, Dr. W. H. Collins. Meet at entrance at 3 p.m.

JUNE 11—Dominion Experimental Farm. By invitation of the Director, Dr. E. S. Archibald. Meet by the Observatory, Carling Ave. entrance, at 3 p.m.

JUNE 18—Rockcliffe Annex. Meet at Post Office, Ottawa, at 3 p.m. Take Eastview bus to terminus on Montreal Road.

LEADERS—Mr. B. A. Fauvel, Mr. Hoyes Lloyd and others.

JUNE 25—Heron Road and Rideau River. Meet on Billings Bridge at 3 p.m.

LEADERS—Mr. B. A. Fauvel, Dr. R. T. D. Wickenden and others.

SEPTEMBER—Four meetings will be held in the Kingsmere area. Details will be announced in the September number of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*.



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