

LABRADOR: PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION.

CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRY.

The Labrador peninsula is divided, roughly speaking, into three main districts: (1) the Atlantic coast, commonly known as the Labrador coast; (2) the Ungava district, comprising Ungava bay and the land drained by the rivers emptying into it; and (3) the east coast of Hudson bay with its several large tributary streams, which forms the west coast of the peninsula. By long-standing custom, initiated by the Newfoundland fishermen, the use of the term "Labrador" has come to be restricted to the Atlantic coast, so I shall continue to use it in that sense in this paper, referring to the second section as Ungava, and the third as the east coast of Hudson bay. In dealing with the Labrador Eskimo, we are concerned only with the coast (they are seldom found farther than 30 miles from the shore-line, except during summer hunting trips into the interior), so it appears better to adopt current divisions, even though they may be a little confusing, than to substitute new terms which would be meaningless until generally adopted.

The Atlantic coast of the Labrador peninsula extends from the Strait of Belle Isle at the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to Cape Chidley, at the western entrance of Hudson strait, a distance of some 700 miles. The entire shore is rough and rocky, rising from a height of 1,000 feet in southern Labrador to lofty cliffs and ranges from 3,000 to 5,000 feet high in the northern section¹. Deep inlets and narrow fiords, fringed by groups of little islands, extend almost continuously up the coast, offering ideal hunting and fishing grounds to the Eskimo. We find them gathered mainly about the trading posts and mission stations situated at the head of the larger inlets and bays.

The Eskimo formerly inhabited the entire Atlantic seaboard of Labrador, but at present are found only north of Hamilton

¹ Near Cape Chidley, in the extreme northern portion of the peninsula, are the Tornga It, or "Spirit Mountains," a wild and impressive group, believed by the Eskimo to be the abode of To'rngak, or Tornga'roak, "the great To'rngak," the chief spirit consulted by their shamans (see map).