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THE CURIOUS RACE OF ARCTIC HIGHLANDERS.

BY LEWIS LINDSAY DYCHE.



THE Arctic Highlanders, the most northern inhabitants of the globe, are not so called because they dwell in the high lands, but because of the high latitude in which they live. Like all other Eskimo tribes they cling to the coast. Their settlements, a few igloos (stone or ice-huts for winter), or tupics (sealskin tents for summer), are scattered from Cape York, $75^{\circ} 55'$, to Etah, $78^{\circ} 18'$, on the shores of Foulke Fiord. Though these people spread over a considerable territory, they number only about three hundred souls. Inglefield Gulf might be considered as the center of their settlements, each of which usually contains from two to a dozen families. These settlements are more permanent in summer than in winter, for in the summer the ice is continually breaking up so that the people cannot travel far with the dog sledges, which are their sole means of taking long journeys. They possess kayaks, it is true, but these are rude, clumsy, and ill-shaped, as compared with those of the Eskimos in central and southern Greenland. The latter have tight skin coats which fit them so closely

about the head and wrists, and are tied so tight about the rim of the kayak—the aperture which the kayaker enters—that no water can possibly get into the boat. But the Highlanders know not of such a garment, and so only go out in their kayaks when the sea is smooth. In fact, there are but two months in the year, July and August, when it is possible for these people to use their little boats, for during the remaining ten months the sea is for the most part covered with ice.

With dogs and sledges, however, the Highlanders are experts. The dogs were originally domesticated wolves, but since Kane and other explorers entered the country, taking dogs with them from Europe and America, the Eskimo wolf-dog has been mixed with other strains of blood. However, the wolfish nature still remains, and the dogs yelp and howl like wolves. Six dogs constitute an ordinary sledge team, and will pull a load weighing from three hundred to a thousand pounds, the condition of the snow and ice of course to be taken into consideration in loading. The sledges vary from three and a half to five and a half feet in length, and from sixteen to twenty-eight inches in width. The runners are generally made of a great number of

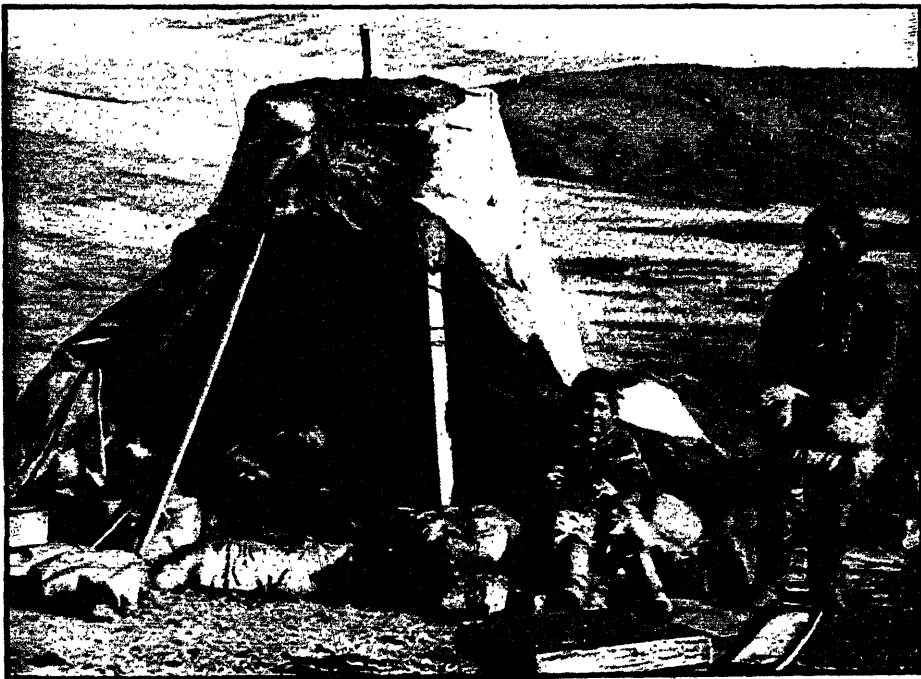
small pieces of wood and bone, all drawn securely together by means of strings of sealskin rawhide, and shod with strips of ivory or bone.

Living isolated from the rest of the world, and struggling against a harsh and difficult environment, these people have developed some strange customs and beliefs. When they were first discovered by Sir John Ross, in 1818, they were much surprised to learn that there were other inhabitants on the globe, for they knew not even of other Eskimos, and thought themselves the only people on the face of the earth. This fact, however, did not make them proud or haughty; they were open to conviction on the evidence of their senses, and so modified their ancient belief. This mania of regarding themselves the only people on the earth is not one that was peculiar to the Arctic Highlanders—it exists still among certain civilized people whom I have visited, who will not accept evidence of their senses, and who are apparently entirely oblivious of the fact that there are others.

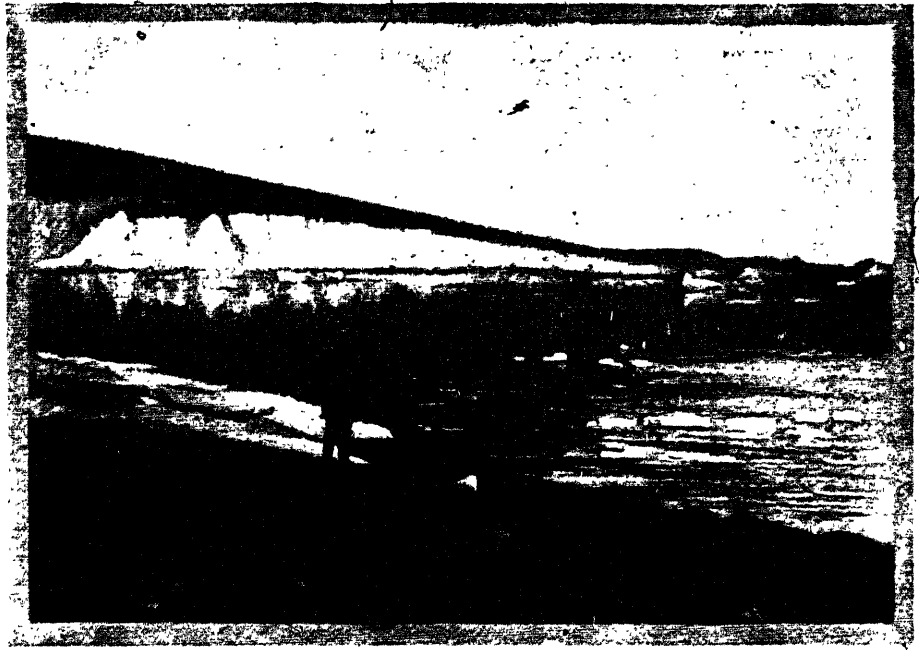
The Eskimo interpreter, whom Ross brought with him from South Greenland

soon recognized the Highland speech as his own, and had no trouble in making himself understood and welcome among his distant cousins. In fact, many of their customs were identical with those of the more southern portion of the race. They are separated from their nearest neighbors on the Greenland side by the wide expanse of country that extends from Cape York through the Melville Bay region as far south as Upernavik. But they have no intercourse with, and except from hearsay, know nothing of, their southern neighbors. They are separated from the people on the North American side by Baffin's Bay. The Eskimos on the west side of Davis Strait, however, have in recent years been known to follow up the coast toward Cape Sabine and then to cross over, and there are now two or three Eskimos living among the Arctic Highlanders who came from the American side.

These people are perhaps the oldest race on the face of the globe, and dwell nearer the original habitat of man than any other people. We are told that the earth cooled off at the poles first, thus making possible plant and animal life;



AN ARCTIC HIGHLANDER "TUPIC"



WATCHING RETURN FROM A SEAL HUNT.

thence these forms of life moved southward. It seems fairly well established that the human race originated in the polar regions. The place prepared by nature for the first life would naturally be the first habitation of man. The place where plant and animal life first originated would naturally be the cradle of the race. The life zone would work southward, but some of the hardier forms of animal and plant life would adjust themselves to their environment and still remain in the polar regions. The polar bear, the arctic fox, and the reindeer are nearer the original home of these animals than any other species or variety, although they must have undergone differentiation in order to keep pace with a changing environment.

Thus it is a tenable supposition that the ancestors of the race may all be buried under the snow and ice of the arctic regions, and that the man of science will be compelled to come here to dig up the missing link. However this may be, the Eskimos are an intensely interesting people, and no satisfactory explanation has yet been given for their existence in the extreme north.

Some maintain that the Eskimos are

the most considerable remnant of that nameless prehistoric race of fishers and hunters who once clung to the coasts of Europe until they were pushed away into the nooks and corners, and to the very verge and edge of the great continents by the successive bands of Arian migrations, until they found their way to the inhospitable northern regions. Some believe that they were forced thither from the coasts, both of Asia and America, by the migration of Indian and Mongolian tribes; but it is not probable that they have lived from time immemorial amid the ice. Up in these regions we still find stunted growths of the pine, the willow, and the birch, and of other growths that now attain their full development under more congenial suns. It may be that like these the Eskimos have remained in the frozen north, unable to attain any high development on account of their hard and difficult surroundings.

But certain it is that the Eskimos have worked out the problem of existence amid surroundings which would have baffled the efforts of the most civilized people. For the latter are only able to live for a year or two at a time in the arctic circle, and must depend, not upon the

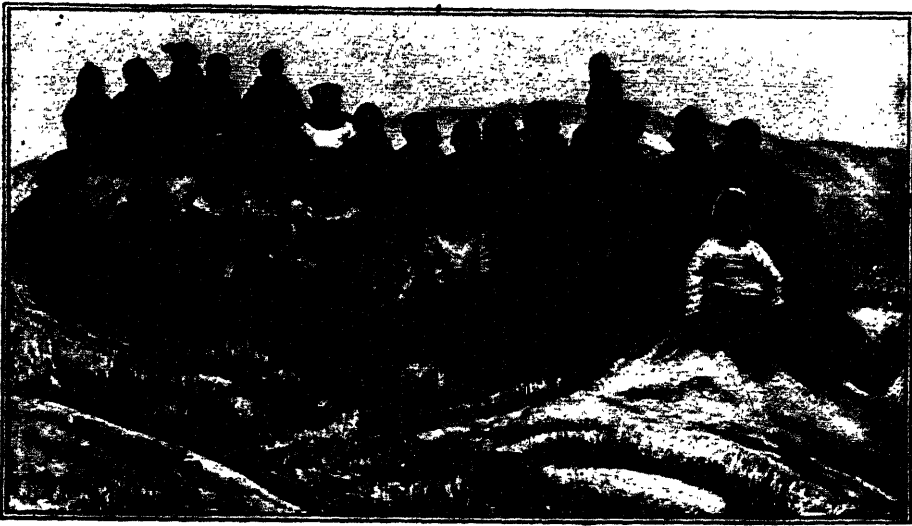
country, as do the Eskimos, to supply them with food and fuel and raiment, but upon supplies and equipments which they have carried with them from civilized communities.

It is interesting to study the way these Eskimos work out their problem of existence, the manner of life, and the peculiar customs which they have developed.

They eat almost nothing but flesh, with very little fish. Most of the meat is eaten raw and without salt. They do not eat blubber, as reported, nor do they drink oil. They enjoy a portion of fat, as we do; but for the most part eat the lean meat, with much gristle, bone, and cartilage, as well as the skins of animals, especially that of the whale, of which they are very fond and which they always take raw. After a little practice I did not object to the raw whale meat myself. It is a little tough and leathery, but a person with good teeth can grind it up by giving it more attention and power than is bestowed on a piece of

diet almost exclusively of meat, mostly eaten raw, would develop some peculiar and fierce traits of character. Animals such as the wolf, lion, hyena, tiger, et cetera, who live upon such diet, as a rule are lean, hungry, and savage. The American Indian who subsists on flesh, is treacherous and warlike in disposition. But on the contrary, the Arctic Highlanders are a most amiable people. They not only seldom quarrel but are of a kind and gentle disposition. They appear very happy in their marital relations, and though they swap wives now and then, this does not indicate any particular dissatisfaction among the parties concerned, and the original husband and wife will generally return to each other.

Love, such as is known as a potent influence in more southern climes, seems here to have little or nothing to do with tying the marital knot. But as the little blind god is always represented, to say the least, in an exceedingly light costume, it may be that the rigorous climate ex-



GROUP OF CHILDREN.

ordinary meat. After eating a meal of whale skin the appetite seems to be satisfied for at least twelve hours. Blubber is used for the most part for fuel, either being burned in the lamps in the igloos, to make heat and to melt ice, or it is mixed with moss and made to burn under a stone, for cooking or heating purposes.

It would naturally be supposed that a

cludes him from the arctic circle. Among the Highlanders, the women who are in the greatest demand for wives are the ones who are the best seamstresses, who can make the best garments, and who can clean and tan skins after the most approved fashion. On the other hand, those men are considered the most desirable husbands who are the best hunters, those who can capture the most seals and bears.

When a young man has made up his mind that it is not good for him to live alone, he casts his eye (which is uninfluenced by beauty) upon some promising young seamstress, and goes and explains matters to the father of the girl. If the father considers that the young man possesses qualities as a hunter which equalize or surpass the talents of his daughter, and the daughter herself is willing, the young man is allowed to take her as his wife. She may, however, return to her father if dissatisfied with her husband's acquirements, and may return to her husband later if he has better luck in the chase; or, if still dissatisfied, she may take another husband. The girls are usually given in marriage when about sixteen years of age. The men are usually over twenty before they become husbands. The women, as a rule, are over twenty before they bear children. When a man dies and leaves a widow, she is usually taken without formality by some man in the tribe who wants a wife. If two or more men desire the same woman, they usually settle the matter in a friendly contest, by wrestling, pulling fingers, or other trials of strength. To the victor belongs the spoil, and no ill-feeling appears to be cherished by the defeated candidate. The trading of wives usually takes place when a married couple is traveling about.



HIGHLANDER WOMAN.

Often when a man and his wife come to a settlement not their own, the man will trade his wife for that of another man's, and leaving his behind him go away with his new companion. But this union as a rule lasts only until the two couples meet again, and then the original mates return to each other. The women do not seem to care where or with whom they live so long as sufficient food and skins are brought into the household.

These people seem to have no laws or any very definite rules or regulations. Neither do they have law-makers, chiefs, or rulers. The angekok, or doctor, a sort of

spiritual doctor or magician, has some influence among them. He works spells upon the sick by singing and chanting and beating on a piece of skin the size of a dinner-plate. The doctor neither eats nor sleeps during the performance of his duties, nor does he allow his patient to do so until the latter says that he is better or well. It is needless to say that under this treatment the patient will ultimately confess to at least an improvement in his condition.

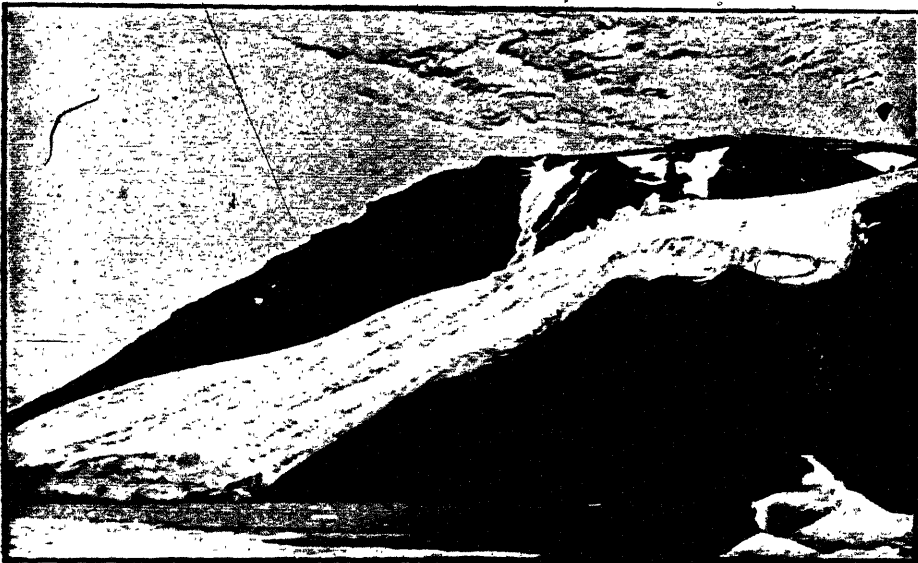
The Highlanders have, however, some understandings or regulations of the most simple kind, and to these they strictly adhere. All small seals and lesser animals are at once the property of the man who captures them; but if a whale or walrus is harpooned it is the common



HIGHLAND WINTER-HOUSE, OR "IGLOO."

property of all present. Nevertheless, in the division of a narwhal into which an Eskimo had thrown a harpoon, and which I had shot and killed about an hour later, I observed that when the animal was butchered, the man who had thrown the harpoon took some of the choice parts for himself, such as the great mass of skin which covered the tail, and the sinew from the back, in addition to his share of the meat. But though the hunter may have a right to a larger share in the game he has captured, he does not exercise this right should want and famine be around him; for it is an unknown thing among these people that

becoming costumes. The women make up with great skill and taste the beautiful white and blue foxskins into short trunk trousers, blending the two colors deftly so as to get the best effect. An Eskimo woman with a foxskin jacket and trousers, and sealskin boots with white bearskin fringes at the top, not merely for ornamental purposes, but to keep out the blowing snow, possesses as handsome and comfortable an outfit as has ever been devised for a woman. It would make an ideal bicycle suit, and is excellently adapted for all kinds of exercise and travel. Nor does it lack in value according to our standards, made as it is from



GLACIER FLOWING INTO GRANVILLE BAY.

some should want while others are living in plenty. If one family has an abundance of seal meat or plenty of bearskins, every hungry family in the neighborhood will be fed, and the bearskins will also be divided. The Eskimo will share his last bit of meat with his neighbor in want. He does not need a missionary to preach to him "love thy neighbor as thyself." For among these people whom we fain would look upon as barbarians, some of the noblest teachings of Christianity are in force—not in words but in acts.

The Eskimo women have no Worths or Redferns to plan gowns for them, and yet nowhere do you find prettier or more

the finest and highest priced furs known to the world of commerce.

The women are really the heads of the family. Marriage does not seem to be a very certain bond of union until children are born. After that the trading of wives, which I have before mentioned, is rare. The men furnish the food, and the women prepare it. They also make and keep the men's clothes and boots in repair.

The parents are extremely fond of their own children in particular, and of all children in general. It is seldom that more than four children are to be found in one family. The children are treated with great tenderness, and are

themselves gentle and well-behaved. They play with each other without quarreling or fighting, and in their vocabulary they have no bad names or threatening epithets to apply to each other. Mothers carry their babies on their backs in a sort of pouch made in their garments. The small children dress in fox or birdskin jackets, made with hoods to cover the heads, leaving the faces free. The jackets come

The women do a great deal of work. Not only do they take care of the skins and make all the clothing and boots, but they remove the hair from the sealskins by dipping them in hot water and then scraping. They chew the skins again and again so as to render them soft and pliable.

Entering a tupic at Cape York, I found three of the women chewing skins and



CAMPING OUT.

down as far as the hips. The child is carried in this pouch most of the time until two or three years old, when it is finally dressed—if a boy, just as a man; or, if a girl, just as a woman, and allowed its freedom about the igloo or tupic. Small children are taken out of the pouch at least twice during a period of five hours and allowed to nurse. The children fret at times, but seldom break out in loud cries or yells. I have seen mothers chew meat carefully and place it in the mouths of their children.

That kindness and patience which the Eskimos show to their children is displayed also towards their dogs. They spare the rod yet spoil neither child nor dog, and so put to shame some of our wise saws and old-fashioned maxims.

three engaged in sewing. One woman was chewing on a large sealskin which she was gradually bringing to flexibility. Two of the women were chewing and sucking the fat out of some little auk skins. I tried one of the little auk skins myself, much to the amusement of the women, and found that the fat did not have a bad taste, and that the task of chewing a skin was not as disagreeable as one would at first imagine. After the skins were thoroughly gone over they were hung up to dry with an occasional rubbing between the hands to make them soft. I watched the women who were sewing. One was working on a kamik, or sealskin boot, and it was surprising to see how easily she pushed a small needle threaded with a fine string of sinew through the double thickness



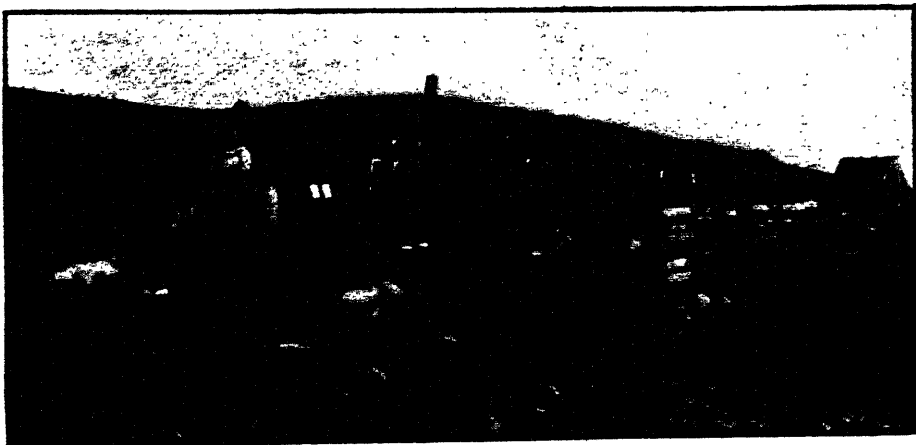
HIGHLAND VILLAGE AT CAPE YORK.

of sealskin, sewing a seam as fine as any machine could make. Her thimble, secured from some whaling vessel, or, possibly, from one of the Peary party, was worn on the first finger. The women who were sewing had their kamiks off, and held the skins between the first (the great) and second toe. It was surprising to see how deftly they could use their toes, it seemed as if they were supplied with a veritable third hand. One woman was sewing little auk skins together into a garment which would eventually be used as an under jacket or shirt. These shirts are worn by both men and women, with the feathers next to the body. I showed one of the women how to pin the garment to her boot and thus save the trouble of using the toes to hold it. She seemed pleased at first, but soon pitched

the boot off and again picked up the garment with her toes. One old woman amused me, and in fact everybody in the tupic, by pulling off her long boots and throwing one foot over her head without touching it with her hands. She then by using her hands placed the other foot behind her head and gave vent to a satisfied "peuk," an expression meaning "good," or "isn't this fine?" We all laughed our approval, and she seemed much pleased.

This occasion seemed to be a formal sewing-bee. Whale skin and boiled whale heart were passed around. I took my share of the whale skin but nibbled rather delicately at the heart, which had only been dipped in boiling water and was very tough.

I desired to take a photograph of



AN IGLOO AT DISCO.

some of the children, and indicated that I wanted their faces washed. The mother took birdskins, spat upon them, and with the skins thus moistened washed the children's faces. Water is scarce with them—very scarce during ten months of the year.

It is necessary to burn blubber in order to melt the ice, there being no other fuel in the country. Hence great economy must be practised. If the cold snow and ice is put into the mouth and swallowed when melting, tongue and throat are affected, becoming sore and swelling up. Yet these people are not

The young women, as a rule, are rather good looking and well formed, the women average being about four feet ten inches in height and the men about five feet four inches. The former weigh about one hundred and eighteen pounds and the latter about one hundred and forty. They are not the short, thick, chubby people that they are generally represented to be.

The Eskimos eat when they are hungry and sleep when they are sleepy, but have no regular time for performing these functions. While traveling, they put up a tupic, or build a snow or ice igloo if



STEAMSHIP KITE.—THE PEARY RELIEF SHIP.

nearly so dirty as I expected from the stories about them that I had read; for there is but little dirt or dust in the country.

Nor are these people fat as is usually reported. I was surprised to see what lean and spare frames they really possessed. Their faces appear large and fat, but this is mainly due to the development of the muscles used in working the jaws in chewing the skins. Their hands and feet are small and well formed; their hair is long and black, and their skin is not nearly so dark as that of the American Indian.

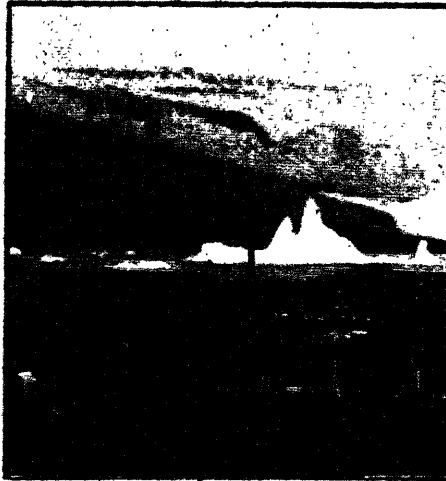
the weather should turn bad; but with clear weather they lie down and sleep anywhere on snow or ice. But at home, in a tupic or igloo, they take off all their clothes rolling themselves up in deer or bearskins when ready to sleep.

They have no form of worship, but believe in a future state, and extend this belief to the lower animals. They believe in spirits, the chief one being the great spirit, the Ko-ko-yah. The Ko-ko-yah may act in the capacity of both good and evil spirit. They do not seem to have any idea of future punishment. Perhaps

it is only those people who are conscious of committing sin that have such ideas.

Their present environment appears to satisfy them entirely, and they make the best of it. They have no longing for another and a better world. "The desire of the moth for the star" does not trouble them. They sometimes imagine that they see spirits, or the Ko-ko-yah; the latter may appear in different shapes and in different ways. The sick are under the influence of the evil spirit, and as the angekok, or doctor, is supposed to enjoy intimate relations with the Ko-ko-yah, we have the secret of his power over the sick. It is very difficult to get an Arctic Highlander to speak of the sick or the dead.

A great advantage of the community of property which exists amongst the Arctic Highlanders is the total absence of litigation and law. There can be no quarreling about property which is vested in all alike. Some one has said that his idea of paradise was in a state of society where there were no courts of justice; well, among the inhabitants of the frozen north this ideal state of society is to be found. Nor do societies for the suppression of this, and the prevention of that, exist



WAIGAT CHANNEL

among them. As they are kind to both children and animals such societies are not necessary. As they have no money nor means of accumulating wealth, their plan of existence is a combination of socialism and individual liberty. We may call them savages, because they do not possess the arts and refinements of modern life, but in the conduct of life itself they can teach us by mere force of example some useful lessons.

