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ARTICLE XI.

GENERAL AND CRITICAL NOTES.

GREENLAND CHRISTIANITY.

THE race of men commonly known as "Eskimo" presents more points of interest to the anthropologist than does almost any other people. A small colony of them lives in Northeastern Asia, west of Bering Strait, but the largest proportion, about 20,000, is found in Northwestern Alaska. From there they extend, in inconsiderable numbers, eastward along the northern coast of British America, to Baffin Bay, and down the coast of Labrador to the Straits of Belle Isle. The western coast of Greenland, however, affords support to the great bulk of the race in Eastern America, about 10,000 of them being at the present time found there.

The name *Eskimo* is not of the people's choosing. It is supposed to mean "eaters of flesh"—a descriptive designation of which they are not proud. They prefer the name *Innuit*,—a term meaning "the people," and implying that they are the only people worthy of consideration. But such egotism is pardonable on account of their isolation, and of their ability to endure conditions of life to which all other races would succumb.

Through the efforts of Lutheran and Moravian missionaries, the natives of Greenland were converted to Christianity more than a century ago (Hans Egede began his work there in 1721); yet by the force of circumstances, the people are compelled to live in nearly the same stage of outward civilization as that which originally characterized their condition. Indeed no other civilization would seem to be possible in their present environment. If Greenland is inhabited at all it must be by people who make the most of its advantages, and the least of its disadvantages. In some countries the degree to which Christianity prevails may be determined approximately by the increase of their commerce. But this sign entirely fails among the Greenlanders, since it is scarcely possible for them to have any extensive commerce which is not to their disadvantage. Almost without exception their products have, to them, a much higher value in use than they can have in exchange.

As is well-known, the interior of Greenland is a vast ice-field, thousands of feet in depth, covering an area of more than 320,000 square miles. Around this central ice-field there is a fringe of mountainous country free from ice, upon the western side varying in width from five to eighty

miles, and still less upon the eastern side, with occasional interruptions where the glaciers come down to the very margin of the sea. Altogether, this fringe measures something less than 200,000 square miles and presents a peculiarly barren aspect. There are no trees in Greenland. The wood employed in making frames for boats and handles for implements, and in constructing roofs for houses, is derived from the drift-wood which is brought down from far-off Siberian rivers, and mingles with the Spitzbergen ice-floe to whose mercy Nansen is now trusting to be carried past the north pole. This moves slowly along the ice-bound coast of Eastern Greenland until it passes Cape Farewell, where it is deflected by the Gulf Stream northward three or four hundred miles along the western coast. Borne along upon this Spitzbergen ice, there comes, with numerous other animals, the saddleback seal, which is the one absolutely essential provision of Nature for the existence of life on these inhospitable shores; for it not only provides meat of nourishing quality in abundance, together with a generous supply of fat to give light and heat to the Eskimo's lamp, and fuel to support his body during the inclement weather of winter, but, most important of all, supplies him, in its skin, with warm clothing from head to foot, and with material for the construction both of his open boats and of the *kayak*, by which he is rendered superior to the billows of even the arctic seas.

The vegetable products of Greenland are scarcely worthy of mention, being limited to a few berries and succulent plants, and an abundance of mosses, which furnish food for reindeer and decompose into peat, which is used to some extent for fuel, but chiefly for sod in banking up and covering the walls of their low stone houses, to protect them from the cold of winter. The diet of the people is thus limited almost exclusively to fish and flesh. Fish of different species and various qualities throng the fiords and channels of the coast during almost all seasons of the year, while, in addition to the flesh furnished by the seal and the reindeer, immense flocks of birds choose the rocky cliffs for their breeding-place in summer,—the eider duck and some other species lingering during the entire year. So useful are these birds and so regular are they in their migrations, that it is difficult for the Greenlanders to see anything miraculous in the ravens which supplied Elijah with food. The skins of the birds, also, furnish a warm lining for the winter clothes of the natives. In the absence of vegetable food, it is a physiological necessity that, ordinarily, both fish and flesh should be eaten uncooked, while the blood is no less a necessity for the health than a dainty dish for the palate.

Both the style of the houses and the fashion of the dress of the Eskimos are determined by the exigencies of the case, rather than by the caprices of European civilization. The fashions of Paris have no attractions to the native Greenlanders. The prime necessity in the Greenland house is that it be so low, and the walls so thick, and the entrances so narrow, that it shall be protected from the fierce blasts, the deep snows, and the

extremely low temperatures of the winter season. From the necessity of the case, also, the clothing of the men and women must be nearly alike. It would be impossible for a woman with skirts to perform with comfort and safety, not to say with cleanliness, either the outdoor or the indoor duties, which, in the appropriate division of labor, fall to their lot; or indeed to get in and out through the passageways which are best fitted to protect their homes from the inclemency of the weather. It is related that a tall missionary could get into the igloos of his parish only by enveloping himself in a sleeping-bag, and then being drawn through the narrow opening.

Yet into these forbidding forms of life, Christianity has poured its inestimable blessings, and brought the full tide of its hopes and consolations, until the whole people observe the morals, support the institutions, and cherish the faith of Christendom. The population is so scattered that the maintenance of Christian institutions is beset with special difficulties; yet by judicious organization the whole field is successfully covered, eight Danish missionaries (to say nothing of the Moravian missionaries) being sufficient to oversee the work of a large number of native catechists, who attend to the instruction of the people both in letters and religion, and maintain services upon the Sabbath, with great faithfulness and regularity. Indeed, I have never been more deeply impressed than by the Sabbath services I was permitted to attend, during a recent visit, at Sukkertoppen, where there is a settlement of about four hundred natives and a substantial church building, and again at Ikamiut, where there are but thirty individuals, living in the most primitive condition in three or four igloos. In the former place the church was crowded to its utmost capacity, the entire population of all ages apparently being present. The services, conducted by a native in the Eskimo language, were evidently of the most inspiring nature, the singing especially being universally participated in by the congregation with great heartiness, after the model of the best congregations in Germany. At Ikamiut the conditions were as primitive as possible. The service was held in an igloo so low that no one could stand upright in it, and during a storm so severe and prolonged that the water was dripping through the roof at almost every point. Yet here, too, the entire population was gathered, who listened attentively to the reading of the Scriptures and to a devout sermon in the native language by the catechist who lives among them, while all united in the dignified chorals, which we had heard at Sukkertoppen.

Nor is Christianity with the Greenlanders a mere form. During this prolonged stay in this out-of-the-way settlement we had abundant opportunity to observe their scrupulous honesty. Notwithstanding the temptation afforded by our defenceless situation, there was not an instance of pilfering, and we experienced nothing but the utmost kindness from them. Apparently, also, the morality of the sexes among themselves is of a high order. Indeed, the very promiscuousness in which they occupy their

habitations is made to contribute to the protection of female virtue, since the girls are constantly under the eye of their mothers, and are thus "chaperoned" without any special effort.

The work of the Danish missionaries in Greenland is sometimes criticised because it has not succeeded in making the people self-contained and capable of an independent political life. Indeed, it is doubtful if the natives could of themselves successfully resist the contamination of foreigners if they were allowed freely to mingle with them. Hence the Danish government has, by treaty with other nations, prohibited the landing of the crews of the vessels which frequent the region, and the trading is entirely in the hands of the agents of Denmark. It can scarcely be questioned that if the country were thrown open to unrestricted commerce with the outside world, the first effect would be a great deterioration of morals and great present distress, ending probably in extermination. To such an extent would the confiding natives at first part with the necessaries of their life, in exchange for cheap clothing and stimulating food that satisfy not, that they would be likely to bring themselves to the verge of famine during their long winters, when they are beyond the reach of Christian philanthropy. The free use of alcohol (from which they are now entirely debarred) and the allurements of the other vices of civilization would probably make quick work of the whole population. Under the protection, however, of the Danish government the people have been so shielded from the immoralities consequent on contact with civilized nations, that venereal diseases, usually so fatal in the wake of the track of commerce, have been almost wholly unknown.

An important lesson forced upon the student of history by such facts as are witnessed in Greenland is, that what is called a high state of civilization is not a necessary consequent of Christianity. Nations, like people, have their period of childhood, and in certain conditions this state is permanent. It is to the glory of Christianity, rather than to its discredit, that it meets the wants of childhood as well as of mature manhood. In such conditions as those which prevail in Greenland, a complex civilization cannot exist. Life there must always continue in about its present simple conditions. In fact the stage of civilization is just about that which is consistent with the practice of those principles of socialism, which are advocated by many modern theorists. The accumulations of food and of material for clothing and for necessary utensils cannot be large, and must all be consumed as they go along. The successful hunters and fishermen must each year share all with their less fortunate or less capable companions. At the same time it is evident that the population has already attained its natural limit in numbers. The stern necessities of the case forbid any great increase. In such a condition of things one may well ask, Is life worth living? The answer is emphatically, Yes. Even in this world they have enough to make them a happy people, and when to this are added the Christian hopes of the life to come, the emphasis of the affirmative answer is overwhelming.

G. FREDERICK WRIGHT