

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE GREENLAND ESKIMO.¹

THIS work deals in a very thorough fashion with the psychology and culture of the three distinct branches of the Eskimos which make up the population of Greenland, namely, the West Greenlanders, the East Greenlanders and the Polar Eskimos. The book is splendidly illustrated by Count Harald Moltke.

The greater part of the book is devoted to a description of the Polar Eskimos, who live on the strip of land north of Cape York, and are the most northerly people in the world. Mr. Rasmussen, who was born in Greenland, appears to have thoroughly understood the people and how to gain their confidence. The consequence is that during his ten months' residence among them he has been able to collect a vast amount of interesting information about their daily life, their beliefs about the origin of the universe, and their fables and legends.

Even the Polar Eskimos, though the least advanced of the three groups of Greenlanders, appear to have progressed well beyond the stage of primitive savagery; they have fully entered the magical stage and to some extent passed into the supernatural. The magician is a man of mighty power amongst them. Their religious beliefs consist of a series of commandments and rules of conduct controlling their relations with unknown forces hostile to man. The magician makes these powers subservient to himself. He has developed his faculties so that he can put himself in communication with the spirits. He uses a special spirit language in his incantations. Magic is said, however, to be degenerating among these Eskimos, because they are not nowadays much exposed to danger.

Some of their beliefs that have apparently been handed down by oral tradition through untold generations are by no means primitive, and have a remarkable resemblance to the beliefs of some peoples in a much more advanced stage of civilisation. The Polar Eskimo believes that every person has a soul, a body and a name. He believes that the soul is immortal, that when the soul leaves the body the body dies, and that on the death of the body the soul ascends into heaven. It is believed that the soul of a man, on his death, may pass into one of the lower animals; the doctrine of the transmigration of souls appears, in fact, to be fully developed among the Eskimos.

The body of the Eskimo at death is buried by his relatives along with all his implements, and his dogs are slain harnessed to a sledge which is placed by his grave. For a woman only one dog is slain.

¹ "The People of the Polar North." By Knud Rasmussen. Compiled from the Danish originals and edited by G. Herring. Illustrations by Count Harald Moltke. Pp. xix+358. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1908.) Price £1 1s. net.

The name was originally believed by the Eskimo to be a kind of soul, which transferred the qualities of a dead person to the living person who received the name.

As regards the personal character of the Polar Eskimo, he appears to take a very practical view of life. The boys learn the main business of life, namely, hunting, in their play, and abstract reflection appears to be unknown. They are very fond of their dogs; one has been known to attack a bear at great personal risk in order to avenge the death of a favourite dog.

Polygamy is rare among them, but there survives a curious custom of exchanging wives which appears to have the full sanction of public opinion.

A very complete collection of the fables and legends of this interesting people will be found in Mr. Rasmussen's volume. These were all collected from the natives by the author, and great care, apparently, was taken to get the correct versions. This material will be invaluable to the folklorists. But whether they

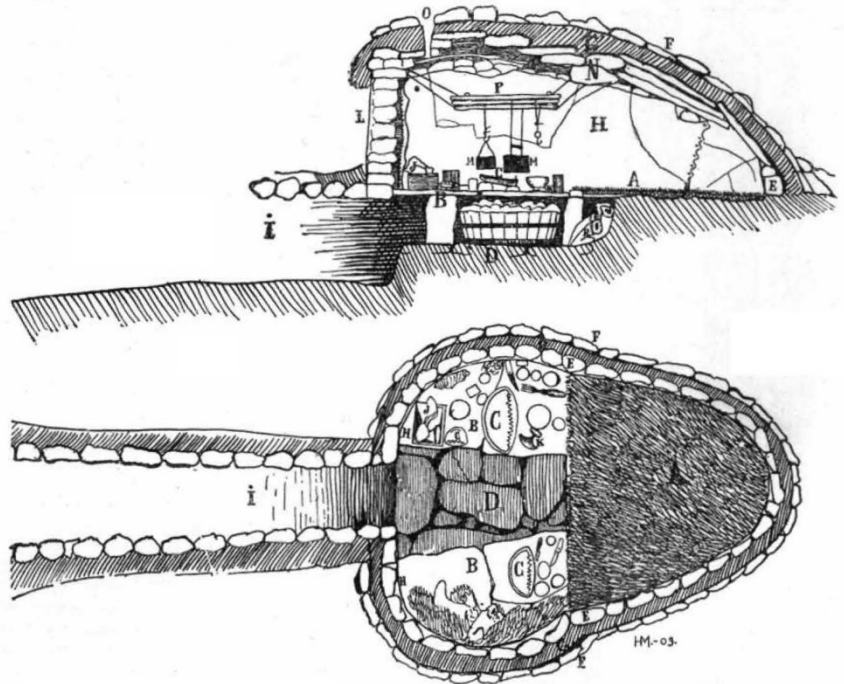


FIG. 1.—Elevation and Plan of an Eskimo Hut. From "The People of the Polar North."

will be of much value, as suggested by Mr. Herring, in tracing the racial origin of the people is doubtful, for very close analogies to some of these tales will be found in the lore of the most distant parts of the earth. For example, the tale of the man who married the goose by stealing her coat of feathers, which she had laid off while bathing, is paralleled by a very similar tale in the "Arabian Nights."

Very little information about the physical characteristics of the Eskimos is given in this book, except what can be derived from the excellent representations of typical natives by Count Harald Moltke. The faces of the Polar Eskimos appear to be decidedly mongoloid. But all measurements of Eskimos hitherto made show that they have a very low cephalic index, not higher than 77, and in some groups as low as 73. This would appear to point to a cross between a mongoloid and some dolichocephalic race, such as was

to be found in Neolithic times in north-western Europe.

The portraits of the West Greenland type show that they approximate much more closely to the European type. These people live much further south, on the tracts of land left between the margin of the great Greenland glacier and the west coast. The West Greenlanders appear to have abundant supplies of food, obtained by hunting and fishing, walrus, seal, halibut, and salmon in the greatest abundance being readily obtainable by the active native. They are very hospitable and superstitious, the latter trait, according to the author, being due to the influence of the long winter night.

The East Greenlanders have now mostly migrated



FIG. 2.—Greenlandic Woman from Kangeq, near Godthaab. From "The People of the Polar North."

from the east coast to West Greenland. Apparently, before they moved, owing to their isolation they had reverted to a state of savagery and developed a kind of murderous mania which led to the most terrible tragedies. Now, when living amongst the West Greenlanders, they appear to have greatly advanced under the influence of the Danish missionaries.

The map attached to the volume would be of much greater value if it contained more of the places referred to in the text.

This book, however, will take a high place as a study of the characteristics of an extremely interesting and fast vanishing people by a competent and sympathetic observer.

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A HUMAN FOSSIL FROM THE DORDOGNE VALLEY.¹

THE curtain which conceals the early history of our race is being in these last years lifted at frequent intervals to afford us glimpses into the distant past. Among the latest revelations are those by the Swiss explorer, M. Hauser, of a nearly complete human skeleton—not yet fully described—from a rock-shelter in the Vézère Valley, chinless, with the great orbits and retreating forehead characteristic of the Neanderthal type; and those still more recently made by the well-known prehistorians the Abbés J. and A. Bouyssonie and M. L. Bardon during their excavation of a cave opening in the vale of a small tributary of the Dordogne river, in the commune of La Chapelle-aux-Saints, in the Corrèze. Their careful and scientifically conducted excavations had previously, in 1905, been rewarded by the discovery of numerous quartz and jasperoid flint implements, scrapers (*racloirs*) and lance-heads (*pointes*), with others rather better finished and suggestive of the Aurignacian, which, taken with the entire absence of ruder amygdaloid implements (*coups de poing*) and of all worked bone, fixes with precision the archaeological horizon as Late Mousterian. The fauna associated with these industrial relics includes reindeer, horse (rare), badger, woolly rhinoceros, marmot, wolf, fox, sheep or goat, a large bovine, and birds, and is characteristic of the cold climate of that epoch, which corresponds, in geological terms, to the Middle Pleistocene.

During last autumn the same three archaeologists resumed their investigations, with the result that on August 3, while digging a trench in the cave, they uncovered a human skeleton, lying on its back, with the head, which was protected by stones, directed to the east. The right arm was bent so that the hand lay towards the body, the left arm was slightly extended, and the limbs were drawn up. Above the head were several large fragments of bone laid flat, while near by was placed the terminal phalanges of the hind hoof, with several of its associated bones, of a large bovine. The body was, therefore, intentionally buried, and as there is an entire absence of fire-places it is concluded by the excavators, but probably not with universal accord, that the cave was not used as a dwelling, but only as a burying-place, where the abundance of bones and implements indicate only the holding of numerous funeral-feasts.

These human remains, which are of the greatest anthropological importance and interest, have been described by M. Marcellin Boule, the distinguished palæontologist, in a preliminary note read on December 14 last before the French Academy of Sciences, and published in the *Comptes rendus* of the academy cited below. The bones comprise a much broken cranium and mandible, vertebræ and limb-bones of a man of 1'60m. (a little more than 5 feet 2 inches) in stature. As the edges of the cranial fragments were unworn, it was possible to piece them very accurately together. The

¹ "L'Homme fossile de la Chapelle-aux-Saints (Corrèze)." Note de M. Marcellin Boule (*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences*, t. cxlviii., No. 24, December 14, 1908).

² "Découverte d'un squelette Humain mousterien à La Chapelle-aux-Saints (Corrèze)." Note de MM. A. and J. Bouyssonie et L. Bardon (*Comptes rendus*, t. cxlvii., No. 25, December 21, 1908).