

RED HUNTERS OF THE SNOWS

AN ACCOUNT OF THIRTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE WITH THE
PRIMITIVE INDIAN AND ESKIMO TRIBES OF THE CANADIAN
NORTH-WEST AND ARCTIC COAST, WITH A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE EARLY CONTACT BETWEEN WHITE FUR TRADERS
AND THE ABORIGINES

BY

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*Illustrations from photographs by the Author,
The National Museum of Canada, and the
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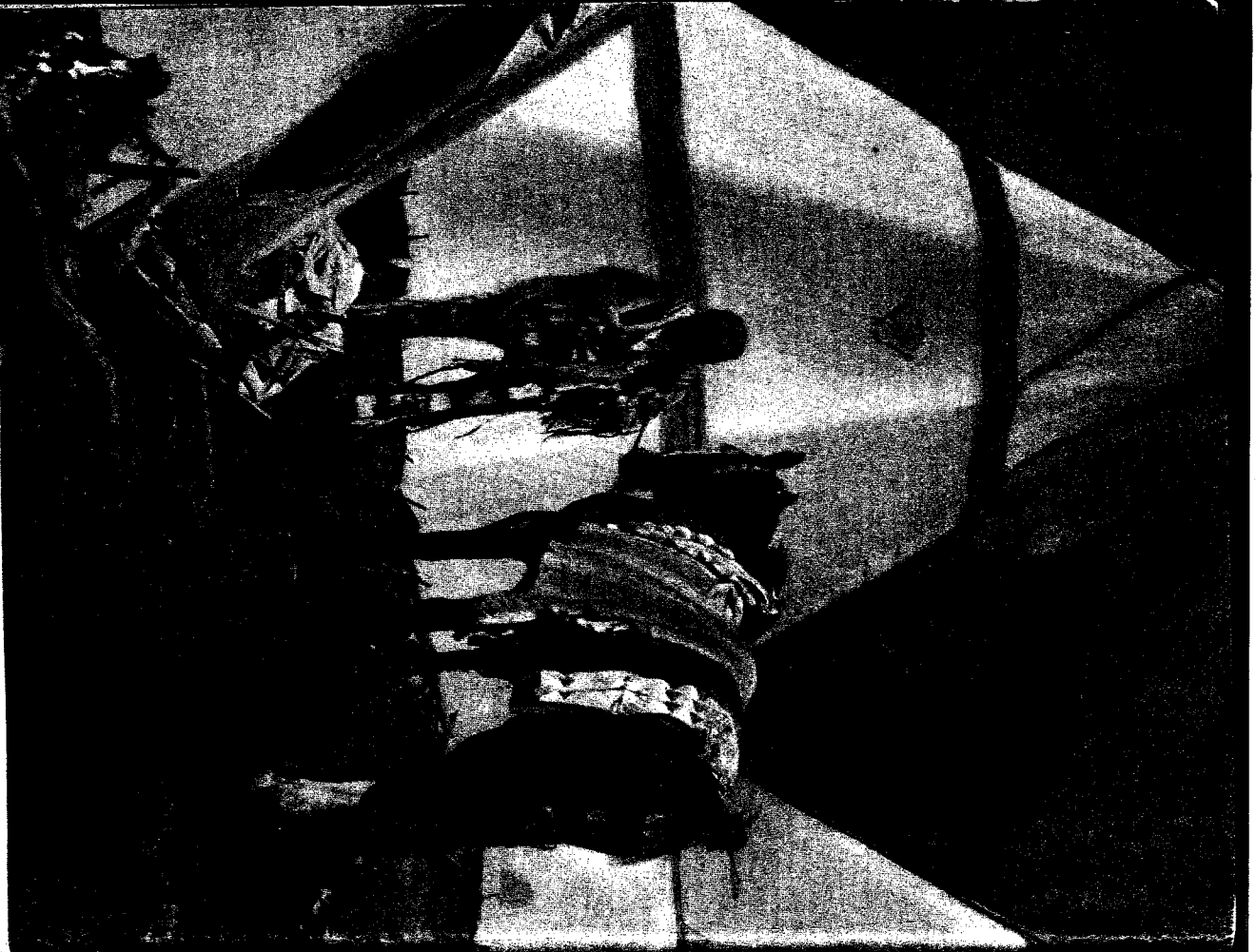
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ASSINABOIN CAMP IN THE ROCKIES



the unspoken words of the departed are conveyed to sorrowing relatives.

White men are inclined to condemn sweepingly the *angatkuk* and all his work, and to look upon him as a fake, yet any old fur trader who has lived long amongst the natives will admit that there are many things in connection with their occult practices which are difficult to explain. During the time I was in the Hudson Bay country two of the Company's officials were at Fort Churchill awaiting the arrival of the ship with the annual trading goods and mail. Days passed until the vessel was considerably overdue, and only those who have lived in these isolated trading posts can appreciate the worry that is entailed under these circumstances. In the store one morning a discussion arose between the two traders and the factor regarding the ability of an *angatkuk* to look into the future. At length it was agreed to put the local Eskimo medicine man to the test. Finally, he went into a trance and later on informed his hearers that his mind had departed from his earthly body and taken a flight through the atmosphere. He added that the ship was safe; she had been delayed through going to the aid of a sister ship, and was now working her way through the light floe ice towards the post. They also had met with misfortune, for one of the passengers had died. Next day, when the sun was a little past the meridian, the vessel would be seen.

At about two o'clock the following afternoon a half-breed servant rushed into the dwelling-house to announce that the ship had been sighted and was rapidly nearing port.

This, of course, was attributed to pure coincidence, but all of them were nonplussed when they heard from the captain that the ship had actually been delayed through going to the aid of another vessel, while a priest, who was

travelling as a passenger, had fallen overboard and was drowned!

The everyday life of these primitive polar people is governed, like our own, by a series of "commandments" which have come down to them through the centuries:

1. After sunset no man shall do any work requiring the use of tools. The women may sew, make garments or chew boots (to soften them).
2. No one shall eat sea food and land food on the same day.
3. The carcasses of all large animals killed during the winter shall be equally divided among all members of the community.
4. All kinds of rare game are common property at all times.
5. Any kind of goods found still remain the property of the original owner.
6. Any person finding a piece of driftwood (a valuable article in Eskimo eyes) can secure ownership by placing his mitten under a stone upon it.
7. If a seal is harpooned and gets away with the weapon the first harpooner loses all claim to it.
8. Whoever is first to see a polar bear has first ownership, regardless of who kills it.
9. After killing a bear, the man who does so must hang up his hunting implements with the bladder of the beast in some conspicuous place for at least three days, and for four days must be separated from his wife.
10. When a walrus is killed the hunter must separate himself from his wife for one day at least.
11. If two hunters shoot at a bird at the same time it shall be equally divided between them.
12. A whale, no matter who may kill it, becomes the common property of the tribe.

13. If any man kills his neighbour the wife and family of the deceased shall become the family of the slayer, and he shall be responsible for their care and upkeep.

It will be readily seen that the opportunity for one Eskimo to amass wealth at the expense of his neighbours is very effectivly guarded against in this primitive bill of rights, which speaks throughout for the strong communal spirit that permeates this race.