

George Cartwright: Journal of Transactions and Events (1792)

Contact with the Labrador Inuit (1771-72)

Tuesday, July 9, 1771. Early this morning I went to Cape Charles, and there pitched my tent upon the continent, directly opposite the Indian Camp; having a tickle between us, not more than eighty yards wide. The instant that I was ready to open shop, I sent my people home, with injunctions not to come near me until I sent them an order in writing for that purpose; or, unless they had any business with me, which could not be deferred till my return. My tent was soon filled with Indians, and we carried on a very brisk trade till two o'clock in the afternoon. [...]

Wednes., July 10, 1771. [...] Very little more than the mere necessaries of life (which, a little reflection will convince everyone, are few indeed) will satisfy an Indian; for he has no stimulus to industry. When he has killed food he has generally procured clothing also; therefore he will work no longer. [...] Yet I have not a doubt, but commerce will, in progress of time, have the same effect on these people, that it ever has had on other nations: it will introduce luxury, which will increase their wants, and urge them to much more industry than they at present possess. They will then purchase traps, learn to build deathfalls, and contrive other devices to kill furs, at such times as a successful seal-chase shall give them leisure to pay proper attention to that branch of trade.

[...] being informed by one of their people, that a principal man amongst them, had stolen a skein of thread; I immediately sent to the chief a peremptory order to bring the thread to my tent, which he accordingly complied with. Having reproved him in a very angry tone for his behaviour, I gave him a few strokes. He instantly made resistance, when catching him in my arms, I gave him a cross-buttock (a method of throwing unknown to them) and pitched him with great force headlong out of my tent. I then appealed to the rest for the justice of my cause, who not only applauded me for the action, but

seemed to have a high opinion both of my lenity and strength. The man went immediately to his tent, and returned with a beautiful seal-skin as a present to me; but I would by no means accept of it, making him and the rest understand, that I did not quarrel with him, that he should make me a present to be reconciled; but because he had been guilty of a dishonest action; and that as he now seemed to be sensible of his crime, I was perfectly satisfied. I told them, that I would never steal anything from them, and as I would not suffer any of my people to plunder them, so neither would I suffer them to rob me with impunity: and I moreover assured them; that nothing should ever induce me to take away their lives. By words and signs together, I made them fully comprehend my meaning, which had the desired effect; for we were afterwards not only upon the most friendly terms; but I seemed likewise to have established an authority over them. [...]

Journey to England with an Inuit Family (1772)

Thursday, October 29, 1772. [...] It was this day determined, that Attuiock, Ickcongoque, his youngest wife; Ickeuna, her daughter; (a child under four years of age) Tooldavinia, Attuiock's youngest brother; and Caubwick his wife, should accompany me to England. Another brother, with his wife, are already gone to England with Perkins and Coghlan's head-man; and their other two brothers, Nawadlock and Scheidley, with their families, and Attuiock's other three wives, with the rest of their children, are to winter at my sealing-post at Stage Cove. I gave them very particular injunctions for their behaviour, and they promised obedience.

Friday, October 30, 1772. [...] The rest of the Indians being gone to Charles Harbour, those who are to go to England with me are accommodated in Mr. Pinson's house. On going into the room where they slept, I observed Attuiock performing a ceremony, which, for its singularity, I shall take the liberty to relate. His wife was laid upon the floor, with her hands by her sides: Attuiock sat on the right side of his wife, so far back, as to have her head opposite to his knees. He had placed a loose strap under her head, which came over her forehead. In this strap he put the end of a strong stick, which he held in his hands across his knees. With great gravity, and in a low, doleful cadence, he

sung a song, frequently laying a strong emphasis on some particular word which I did not understand; at the same time, by the help of a lever, he raised her head as high as the length of her neck would permit, and then let it bump down again upon the floor, keeping time to the tune. As I supposed it was a religious rite, (he being a priest) I silently observed what was going forward. At length, the old gentleman fixing his eyes on me, pointed to his wife, with an important look, and said, "It is very good, very good." "That may be," replied I, "but pray what is it good for?" "My wife has got the head-ach," answered the priest. Not willing to affront him, I got out of the room as fast as possible, that I might indulge myself in a hearty laugh, at the curious Esquimau method of curing that complaint. [...]

Sunday, November 8, 1772. At day-break we put to sea, and set sail for Ireland. We found a very great sea in the streights, and by night were two leagues to the eastward of the island of Belle Isle. [...]

Sunday, November 22, 1772. The Indians grew extremely uneasy today, and insisted that we had lost ourselves and should never more see land. I then examined the log book, and shewed them upon the chart where we were; adding, that we should make the land of Ireland, near Cape Clear, to-morrow; but they gave very little credit to what I said. [...]

Monday, December 14, 1772. I went down the river this morning, met the vessel in the Pool, and brought the women on shore. They were greatly astonished at the number of shipping which they saw in the river; for they did not suppose that there were so many in the whole world: but I was exceedingly disappointed to observe them pass through London Bridge without taking much notice of it. I soon discovered that they took it for a natural rock which extended across the river. They laughed at me when I told them it was the work of men; nor could I make them believe it, till we came to Blackfriars Bridge, which I caused them to examine with more attention; shewing them the joints, and pointing out the marks of the chizzels upon the stones. They no sooner comprehended by what means such a structure could be erected, than they expressed their wonder with astonishing significance of countenance.

On landing at Westminster Bridge, we were immediately surrounded by a great concourse of people; attracted not only by the un-

common appearance of the Indians who were in their seal-skin dresses, but also by a beautiful eagle, and an Esquimau dog; which had much the resemblance of a wolf, and a remarkable wildness of look. I put them all into coaches, with as much expedition as possible, and drove off to the lodgings which I had prepared in Leicester Street. [...]

Being willing, as far as lay in my power, to comply with the incessant applications of my friends for a sight of the Indians; and finding it impossible either to have any rest, or time to transact business, I appropriated two days a week to that purpose, viz., Tuesdays and Fridays. On those days, not only my house was filled, even to an inconvenience, but the street was so much crowded with carriages and people, that my residence was a great nuisance to the neighbourhood.

As their skin dresses had a dirty appearance and an offensive smell, I provided a quantity of broad-cloth, flannel, and beads, together with whatever else was necessary; and the women now having leisure to work, and being excellent taylors, soon clothed them all anew; preserving their own fashion in the cut of their garments.

I once took the men to the opera when their Majesties were there, and we chanced to sit near Mr. Coleman, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, who politely invited all the Indians and myself to a play at his house. He fixed on Cymbeline, and they were greatly delighted with the representation. But their pride was most highly gratified, at being received with a thundering applause by the audience on entering the box. The men soon observed to their wives, that they were placed in the King's box, and received in the same manner as their Majesties were at the opera; which added considerably to the pleasure which they felt from the *tout ensemble*. Never did I observe so young a child pay such unremitting attention to the whole representation, as little Ickeuna; no sooner did the swords begin to clash, in the fighting scene between Posthumus and Iachimo, but she set up a most feeling scream.

About a fortnight after our arrival in town, having provided great-coats, boots, and hats for the men, in order that they might pass through the streets unobserved, I took Attuiock with me and walked beyond the Tower. We there took [a] boat, rowed up the river, and landed at Westminster Bridge; from whence we walked to Hyde Park Corner, and then home again. I was in great expectation, that he would begin to relate the wonders which he had seen, the instant he

entered the room; but I found myself greatly disappointed. He immediately sat down by the fire side, placed both his hands on his knees, leaned his head forward, fixed his eyes on the ground in a stupid stare; and continued in that posture for a considerable time. At length, tossing up his head, and fixing his eyes on the ceiling, he broke out in the following soliloquy; "Oh! I am tired; here are too many houses; too much smoke; too many people; Labrador is very good; seals are plentiful there; I wish I was back again." By which I could plainly perceive, that the multiplicity, and variety of objects had confounded his ideas. [...]

Although they had often passed St. Paul's without betraying any great astonishment, or at least not so much as all Europeans do at the first sight of one of those stupendous islands of ice, which are daily to be seen near the east coast of their own country, yet when I took them to the top of it, and convinced them that it was built by the hands of men (a circumstance which had not entered their heads before, for they had supposed it a natural production) they were quite lost in amazement. The people below, they compared to mice; and insisted, that it must at least be as high as Cape Charles, which is a mountain of considerable altitude. Upon my asking them how they should describe it to their countrymen on their return, they replied, with a look of the utmost expression, they should neither mention it, nor many other things which they had seen, lest they should be called liars, from the seeming impossibility of such astonishing facts. [...]

And it was a great treat to me, both then and at all other times, to observe their different emotions, much more forcibly expressed in their countenances, than is possible to be done by those, whose feelings are not equally genuine. Civilized nations imperceptibly contract an artificial expression of countenance, to help out their languid feelings; for knowledge, by a communication with the world and books, enlightens our ideas so much, that they are not so liable to be taken by surprise, as the uninformed mind of the savage, who never had the least hint given him, that certain things are in existence; consequently, they break upon him as unexpectedly, and forcibly, as the sun would do upon a man who was born deaf and blind, in case he should suddenly be brought to sight on a clear day. [...]

After my return to town, by his Majesty's permission, I took them to Court; where their dresses and behaviour made them greatly taken notice of. They were also at the houses of several of the nobility and people of fashion; and I omitted nothing, which came within the compass of my pocket, to make their stay in England agreeable, or to impress them with ideas of our riches and strength. The latter I thought highly necessary, as they had often, when in Labrador, spoken of our numbers with great contempt, and told me they were so numerous, that they could cut off all the English with great ease, if they thought proper to collect themselves together; an opinion which could not fail to produce in me very unpleasant reflections. But they had not been long in London before they confessed to me, that the Esquimaux were but as one, compared to that of the English. [...]

Smallpox and the Return to Labrador (1773)

Saturday, May 8, 1773. Having now completed all my business in town, and the wind being fair, at two o'clock this afternoon we made sail down the river; the Esquimaux well pleased in the expectation of soon seeing their native country, their relations and friends again; and I very happy in the prospect of carrying them back, apparently in perfect health. [...]

Thursday, May 13, 1773. The pleasing prospects which I so lately had before me were of very short duration; for this evening as Caubwick was going to bed, she complained of great sickness at her stomach, had a very bad night, and daily grew worse. On my arrival at Lymington on the thirteenth, and consulting a surgeon there, (for my own, I found, was utterly ignorant of her complaint) he declared her malady to be the small-pox: which had nearly the same effect on me, as if he had pronounced my sentence of death. As it was vain to expect that the rest should escape the infection, medicines were immediately given to prepare them for it. [...]

At two o'clock in the morning of the twenty-ninth, we weighed again, and proceeded down the channel with a fair wind and pleasant weather; still in hopes of arriving in sufficient time for my business; but at ten o'clock, so dreadful a stench pervaded the whole vessel, all the Indians being now ill, that three of the ship's crew now were seized

with a fever, and we had reason to expect, that a pestilential disorder would soon attack us all. I therefore ordered captain Monday to carry the vessel into Plymouth, although I foresaw that measure would prove an immense loss to me, by the ruin of my voyage, and we came to an anchor in Catwater the next afternoon at two o'clock. I went on shore immediately, and made a personal application to Earl Cornwallis, Admiral Spry, and the Mayor of Plymouth, for an house to put the Indians in, but could not succeed.

Monday, May 31, 1773. Ickeuna died this morning, Caubwick had a violent fever on her, and the rest were extremely ill. In the evening I bargained for a house at Stonehouse, for two guineas and a half per week. At four o'clock the next morning we weighed and removed the vessel to Stonehouse Pool. I got the Indians on shore immediately, and Ickcongoque died that night. [...]

Thursday, June 10, 1773. I left London on my return to Plymouth at six o'clock this morning, and arrived at Stonehouse on Saturday evening. I was now informed that both the men died in the night of the third Instant, and that Caubwick had been given over, but was at length in a fair way of recovery, though reduced to a skeleton, and troubled with a great many large boils. She recovered so very slowly, that it was not until the fourth of July that I durst venture to remove her, when I once more embarked with her and all the rest of my family (except my maid whom I had discharged for bad behaviour) to proceed on my intended voyage. [...]

Caubwick's hair falling off, and being matted with the small-pox, I had much difficulty to prevail on her to permit me to cut it off, and shave her head. Notwithstanding I assured her that the smell of the hair would communicate the infection to the rest of her country folks on her return, yet I was not able to prevail on her to consent to its being thrown overboard. She angrily snatched it from me, locked it up in one of her trunks, and never would permit me to get sight of it afterwards; flying into a violent passion of anger and grief whenever I mentioned the subject, which I did almost every day, in hopes of succeeding at last. [...]

Tuesday, August 31, 1773. About noon almost the whole of the three southernmost tribes of Esquimaux, amounting to five hundred souls or thereabouts, arrived from Chateau in twenty-two old English

and French boats [...] but the wind did not suit them to come hither till this morning.

I placed myself upon a rock near the water-side, and Caubwick sat down a few paces behind me. We waited for the landing of the Indians with feelings very different from theirs; who were hurrying along with tumultuous joy at the thoughts of immediately meeting their relations and friends again. As the shore would not permit them to land out of their boats, they brought them to their anchors at a distance off, and the men came in their kyacks, each bringing two other persons, lying flat on their faces; one behind and the other before, on the top of the skin covering. On drawing near the shore, and perceiving only Caubwick and myself, their joy abated, and their countenances assumed a different aspect. Being landed, they fixed their eyes on Caubwick and me, in profound, gloomy silence. At length, with great perturbation and in faltering accents, they enquired, separately, what was become of the rest; and, were no sooner given to understand, by a silent, sorrowful shake of my head, that they were no more, than they instantly set up such a yell, as I had never before heard. Many of them, but particularly the women, snatched up stones, and beat themselves on the head and face till they became shocking spectacles. [...] In short, the violent, frantic expressions of grief were such, as far exceeded my imagination; and I could not help participating with them so far, as to shed tears most plentifully. They no sooner observed my emotion, than, mistaking it for the apprehensions which I was under for fear of their resentment, they instantly seemed to forget their own feelings, to relieve those of mine. They pressed round me, clasped my hands, and said and did all in their power to convince me, that they did not entertain any suspicion of my conduct towards their departed friends. As soon as the first violent transports of grief began to subside, I related the melancholy tale, and explained to them, as well as I could, the disorder by which they were carried off; and pointed to Caubwick, who bore very strong, as well as recent, marks of it. They often looked very attentively at her, but, during the whole time, they never spoke one word to her, nor she to them. As soon as I had brought the afflicting story to a conclusion, they assured me of their belief of every particular, and renewed their declarations of friendship.