

LAJLA: A TALE OF FINMARK

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Lajla: A Tale of Finmark by J. A. Friis & Ingerid Markhus

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J. A. FRIIS & INGERID MARKHUS

**LAJLA: A TALE
OF FINMARK**

LAJLA
A TALE OF FINMARK

BY
PROF. J. A. FRIIS

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY

INGERID MARKHUS

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LAJLA.

I.

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THE EMPTY CRADLE.

AWAY in the north of Finmark* and far in the interior is the small village of Karasjok, which takes its name from the river upon whose banks it lies, Karasjok in the Lappish tongue signifying "the rapid river."

In the centre of a plain which the river has formed stands a small wooden church, and round about it live a few Lapp families.

It is a beautiful place in the summer, for on the plain grows luxuriant grass, and on the low ridges are handsome pine groves.

At present a clergyman lives there, but in

* Finmark is the most northerly district of Norway, inhabited by Lapps, whom the Norwegians call Finns.

the past century, when what is here related happened, the parson came only twice a year, and besides the native inhabitants only a Norwegian sheriff and a trader lived in the village.

The merchant's name was Lind. He and his wife had come up the river by boat from the coast one summer's day, and had brought with them a quantity of goods for bartering with the Lapps.

No one, however, knew any thing about the merchant and his wife, except that they were both young and childless when they came there, but after the lapse of a year they had a daughter. Instead of waiting, until a clergyman came, to have the child baptized, they decided to go with it to Koutokeino, a similar station farther in the interior of that desolate country, where also there was a church, and where, at that time, a clergyman resided all the year round. The distance between the two places is about one hundred miles. In the summer travelling must be undertaken on foot, but in winter reindeer sledges can be used, and the journey performed in two days.

On the day before Christmas-eve, many

years ago, five reindeer, each harnessed to a sledge, stood outside merchant Lind's house in Karasjok.

The merchant's hired man Lars, or, as the Lapps say, Lasse, was engaged in packing on one of the sledges a kettle, some frozen venison, and sundry other articles, betokening that some one was about to go on a long journey.

All the reindeer were large, splendid animals, one of them, as seldom happens, being white as chalk, and another dappled. The rest were of the common ash-gray color, and all had large, branching horns. They belonged to the trader, who with his wife was going to Koutokeino to get their little girl, now three months old, baptized on Christmas-day.

The deer used by the couple, especially the chalk-white one, which the wife was to drive, had each a beautiful harness, a belt around the neck and body, trimmed with red embroidery, tassels, silver thread, and numerous small bells. The wife or daughter of a wealthy Lapp thinks it is very grand to come to church in a white fur cloak, decorated with all kinds of embroidery in red worsted, and driving a chalk-white deer.

The reindeer had evidently long been standing tied, for they had stopped eating of the moss which had been laid before them, and were impatiently pawing the ground with their forefeet, shaking their horns, and pulling the long lines of walrus hide which, like halters, were tied about their heads.

They were obviously tired of their captivity, and very eager to be moving, so that those who were to drive them might rest assured that the first two or three miles would be done at a tearing gallop.

Inside, in the sitting-room of the house, sat the young wife with the infant in her arms, while a native girl was busied in putting various articles to rights in a Lapp cradle, one of those contrivances which after a thousand years' experience has been made as suitable as possible for winter journeys often undertaken in biting cold and in snow-storms, and over trackless wastes.

Such a cradle is hollowed out of wood, and the child's head rests under a calash, from which are stretched, down to the foot, strong bands or cords, forming a close netting. Over

the cords can also be placed a kerchief or cloth, so that the child may lie completely sheltered and still breathe freely. From one end of the cradle to the other runs a strong strap, by means of which it can be carried on the back, or hung up in a tree and swung from side to side. It can also be drawn along or rolled over the ground, and will withstand thirty degrees of cold without the infant's being in any danger.

On the front of the calash, or canopy, over the child's head, it is customary to hang glass beads, rings, or other rude ornaments, with which the little one can play. In olden times, on a boy's cradle, they hung a bow and arrows and small spears, as an omen of his becoming a powerful hunter. On a girl's were placed the wings, feet, and beak of a ptarmigan, as an indication that, like that bird, she was to be cleanly, active, and neat.

"Are you sure now, Magga, that the moss is quite dry, that you are putting in the cradle?" the mother asked the girl.

"Oh, yes," answered she, "it is so dry, so dry, and so soft. There is none better to be found in the whole Dilje Mountain."