

III.—*The Inuits of our Arctic Coast.*

By His Honour Lieut.-Governor J. C. SCHULTZ, LL.D., M.D.

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I.

Among the many Indian tribes of the west, northwest and north, of which, on the fifteenth day of July, 1870, the Dominion of Canada assumed the wardenship, there were none more remote, less known and more interesting from an anthropological point of view than the aborigines of our northern coast and of the islands of our arctic archipelago. Such meagre knowledge as we possessed of the interesting people, who, from Melville Peninsula to Herchel Island, inhabited these icy coasts and islands, was principally derived from such incidental records of their pursuits, habits and character as were to be found in the journals of those courageous and indefatigable searchers for a northwest passage, to whom, except in some notable cases, all else, save that supposed waterway, was of little moment. Hence we find, as is usual when only one side of the narrative of rencontres is told, the impression created that these isolated savages deserved, in a measure, the character which had, in the early years of Norwegian and Icelandic discovery, been given them by voyagers who, if we may believe their own records, murdered some of them in sheer wantonness, and carried off others to die from home-sickness for the barren rocks whence they had been taken, or drowned in vain attempts to reach their native shores by flight in improvised kayacks.

So much new light regarding this strange people has come to us of late years from missionaries, Danish and Hudson's Bay traders and other sources, such as the cruise of the U. S. steamer "Thetis," that the time has, I think, come for a reconsideration of the estimate which has been formed of a people so homogeneous in appearance, language and in their habits and mode of life, who occupy a region more extended than that of any of the aboriginal tribes of North or South America, and who differ so much from all other savages of the new or old world.

An examination of such records as are available brings us in contact with them at a very early period on the eastern borders of the five thousand miles of coast line which they are known at one time to have occupied, and although this takes us beyond the strict limits of the title of this paper, yet it may be admissible, in view of their apparently common origin and the remarkable homogeneity of which I have spoken.

The story of "Lief," the son of "Eric the Red," with his companion "Biorn," and their discovery of Vinland, or Wine Land, is too well known to need recapitulation. "Thorwald," Lief's brother, eager for further discovery, is said to have sailed with Lief's crew the following year, examining the country to the westward of what was probably the