

PREFACE.

The purpose of the first section of this book is to show what conclusions it is possible to draw from the mode of life, the customs and usages of the Eskimo, so far as regards the migrations by which they have spread over their present territory. But it is not intended to go farther back than the commencement of this dispersion. Especially do our conclusions not imply a decided opinion on the question so frequently discussed, whether the cradle of the race was in America or in Asia. At the same time, however, it attaches a greater importance to the New, than to the Old World as a factor in what must be considered the ancient history of the Eskimo. In order to trace out their origin, the principal source of knowledge will most likely have to be finally sought for in their language and traditions. As to language, — vocabularies will be required, showing how the same idea is expressed throughout the different dialects, according to the system now adopted by the American authors on aboriginal linguistics (Powell: «Introduction to the study of Indian languages»). But a comparison of this kind cannot attain its real value, without explaining at the same time, how the compound words have originated from their stems or elements. It is the principal object of the present work to give an idea of these elements in the Eskimo language, and the admirable construction of words by means of them. We shall then be enabled to explain a comparative vocabulary in a subsequent volume, by referring to the rules stated in the present one.