

## THE AMERICAN ARCTIC SAVAGE.

BY FREDERICK SCHWATKA.



**S**KIRTING the rim of the great Arctic Ocean with its area about equal to that of the United States, are to be found several savage communities differing in racial, tribal and other ethnographic elements; and to describe those which are confined to the American continent, or the American Arctic savage, is the object of this article.

While Lapland and Siberia give a number of different tribes having no common language, customs, etc., as the Lapps, Samoyedes, Tchukchees, and others, it is a somewhat singular fact that the American continent gives but one, the Eskimo, although its length of Arctic coast-line is nearly equal to that of the eastern hemisphere, making up in sinuosities almost what it lacks in longitudinal spread. Where the mighty Mackenzie River sweeps into the Arctic, and Alaska's noblest stream, the Yukón, just tips the circle of that zone, both water-courses carry with them the American Indian for a very short distance within the polar regions; but to where this race occupies a mile along the polar parts of these rivers, the Eskimo extends a hundred miles beyond the Arctic circle into the temperate zone. In fact no savage race in the world, or within historic times, has spread over and held such a vast extent of territory as the Eskimo. And yet this vastness, reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and facing both those great bodies of water, is insignificant in depth, being merely the coast-line which stretches from one ocean to the other around the northern part of America, and from which the Eskimo dare not depart any distance, as from the sea come three-fourths of the sustenance he manages to wrest from a niggardly nature. From half-way down the cheerless, ice-bound coast of Labrador (once beyond the straits of Belle Isle), the Eskimo is found in straggling numbers and interrupted intervals

along the shore of the northern Atlantic, northern Hudson's Bay, all the Arctic Ocean, the American side of Bering's Sea and the Pacific Ocean to about the mouth of the Copper River of Alaska—from the St. Lawrence to St. Elias.

Politically the Eskimo are under four flags of civilized powers; those of Greenland owing Danish allegiance, the British cross of St. George being over all to Alaska, where our own stars and stripes occasionally greet their sight, while a very few that have found a foothold on the nearest Asian shores are under the great White Czar. Yet with this vast longitudinal stretch of country encompassed, I doubt if all the Eskimo of America would outnumber many of our western Indian tribes which find their homes within much narrower limits of territory.

Why human beings have been found living in this lone land of desolation has given rise to no little theorizing and speculation, the bulk of which seems to be that they are cruelly forced to abide here by the supposed greater strength of the savages to the south of them. My own ideas are with the "respectable minority" which believes that they are found in these regions for the same reasons that we find the reindeer, the musk-ox, and the walrus; that is, it suits their peculiar temperament and disposition better than any other climate or condition possibly could, and they are no more forced into the frigid zone by other savages than the animals named are held there by the antelope, buffalo, or caribou of lower latitudes. When they are taken from their Hyperborean home they are as restless to return as the castaways in their own land are to get back to civilization, and singular enough, despite all their desolate surroundings, they are the most happy and contented race, savage or civilized, in the four corners of the earth; although it is the coldest corner. The tale told by Captain Hall of the deep longing of the sick and sinking Eskimo, Kudlago, to see his land of ice and snow before he