

THE BARREN GROUND OF NORTHERN CANADA.*

IN this book we have the story of the two years' adventures of a British sportsman in the wilds of the great northwest territory of British North America. The "Barren Ground," so called, lies north of the Dominion of Canada, and stretches from Hudson's Bay on the east to the Rockies and Alaska on the west. Lake Athabaska, the Great Slave Lake, and the Great Bear Lake, are its chief bodies of water; through it the Mackenzie River winds its long way to the Arctic Ocean; and over it are scattered the lonely outposts of the Hudson's Bay Company. Countless lakes and rivers and scanty forests diversify this million of square miles, which winter holds in an undisputed grip for nine months out of every twelve, and a great portion of which the foot of the white man has never trod. No roads traverse this desolation. The rivers and the lakes are the natural highways for the canoes of the Indians, and a few buffaloes, wolverines, foxes, rabbits, and, most notable of all, the caribou and the musk ox, have here their ranges. It was to hunt the musk ox that Mr. Warburton Pike made the expeditions recounted in these pages.

Was the game worth the candle?

Certainly not many quarters of the globe environ the hunter with a less attractive landscape, or subject him to severer hardships. Mr. Pike's narrative is one of most arduous toil, exposure to the rigors of an Arctic winter, scarcity of food, and perils of sundry sorts which stout hearts might hesitate to face even in a nobler cause. Two short summers — of 1889 and 1890 — and the intervening winter were spent in the several expeditions, in the course of which he traversed the Great Slave Lake, and followed its tributaries and adjacent chains of lakes to the northeast until he was within a few miles, comparatively speaking, of Bathurst Inlet. In the winter following he made a rash attempt to force the Peace River Pass through the Rocky Mountains into the Pacific slopes of British Columbia, and nearly perished, as

the party lost their way and were in imminent danger of starvation. The account of this experience is thrilling.

As for the rest, the reader is treated to long marches, rascally Indians, filthy lodges, an often disgusting diet, tedious portages from lake to lake, perils in frozen waters and summer snow storms, exciting meetings with troops of musk ox and the caribou, and the ruthless slaughter of "meat," much of which is left to rot by the way. The British "sportsman" is again at his best in this book, though we are bound to say that the author does lay a large share of blame on the Indian.

The relieving spots in this dismal waste of uninhabited and uninhabitable land are the stations of the Hudson's Bay Company, with their mild, humane, and beneficent rule over the Indians, and the patient, self-denying labors of the missionaries, than whom there are no nobler examples of Christian consecration on the face of the globe today.

There are no pictures in the book, but we can easily make one for the reader that will tell him the whole story: a treeless expanse backed by low-lying rocky ridges, a river stringing on its course a chain of lakes, a herd of musk ox, shaggy and brown, standing against the sky a mile away, a troop of caribou scurrying by, a hunter and his Indian guide in furs and on snowshoes, a patter of rifle shots, and a gluttonous feast in the lodge after the day's "sport" is done.

The incidental part of Mr. Pike's trip, as an exploration, was the best part of it; and the two maps he supplies, especially the first one, add something to our accurate knowledge of the water ways of this "Barren Ground," which is God-forsaken indeed, and where human life is about at its lowest estate.

*The Barren Ground of Northern Canada. By Warburton Pike. Macmillan & Co. \$2.00.