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THE BARREN GROUND OF NORTHERN CANADA.¹

WHEN Prodicus sought to give a higher ethical value to the story of Heracles, he invented for the youth of Greece the beautiful fable in which the labours of the hero are represented as the result of a deliberate choice of a life of hardships and virtue in preference to one of ease and vice. Englishmen have rarely failed to satisfy this test. Capacity for endurance has long been a leading characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the fact that this race holds to-day so large a proportion of the vacant spaces of the earth is more to be attributed to a certain passion for adventure noticeable in the individual than to any public policy. Mr. Pike is not the first Englishman who, for pure love of adventure, has engaged in an enterprise of which the practical results appeared to be wholly disproportionate to the efforts required. Nor is he the first adventurer who has possessed the necessary literary outfit to present the results of his travels to the public in a becoming form; but his record is "hard to beat," whether we regard the matter or the manner of his narrative.

In the extreme north of Canada there is a triangle of land enclosed by the Arctic Sea, the Mackenzie River, and the Back River. The base of this triangle is formed by the coast line between the mouths of the two rivers, and its apex by the Great Slave Lake. On the shores of this lake the Hudson's Bay Company have two stations, Fort Resolution and Fort Reliance. The district of the lake has long served as a basis for Arctic exploration on the mainland, and the sterile region to the north is full of memories of Hearne, Mackenzie, Franklin, and Back. But although the courses of the two rivers and the outline of the Arctic coast have been made known by the efforts of these heroic adventurers and their successors, the interior country remains still practically unexplored.

During the two years Mr. Pike remained in Northern Canada he made Fort Resolution his headquarters. From this point he undertook frequent excursions into the Barren Ground, in the course of which he endured dangers and hardships sufficient for a lifetime. Mr. Pike's object was different from that of the ordinary arctic explorer. From conversation with the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, he had heard of "a strange animal, a relic of an earlier age," that was still to be found roaming the Barren Ground. His informants could tell him nothing of the musk-ox, as the animal is named, from personal experience. All that was known had been gathered from the reports of Indians. Once or twice enthusiastic

(1) By Warburton Pike. Macmillan. 1892.